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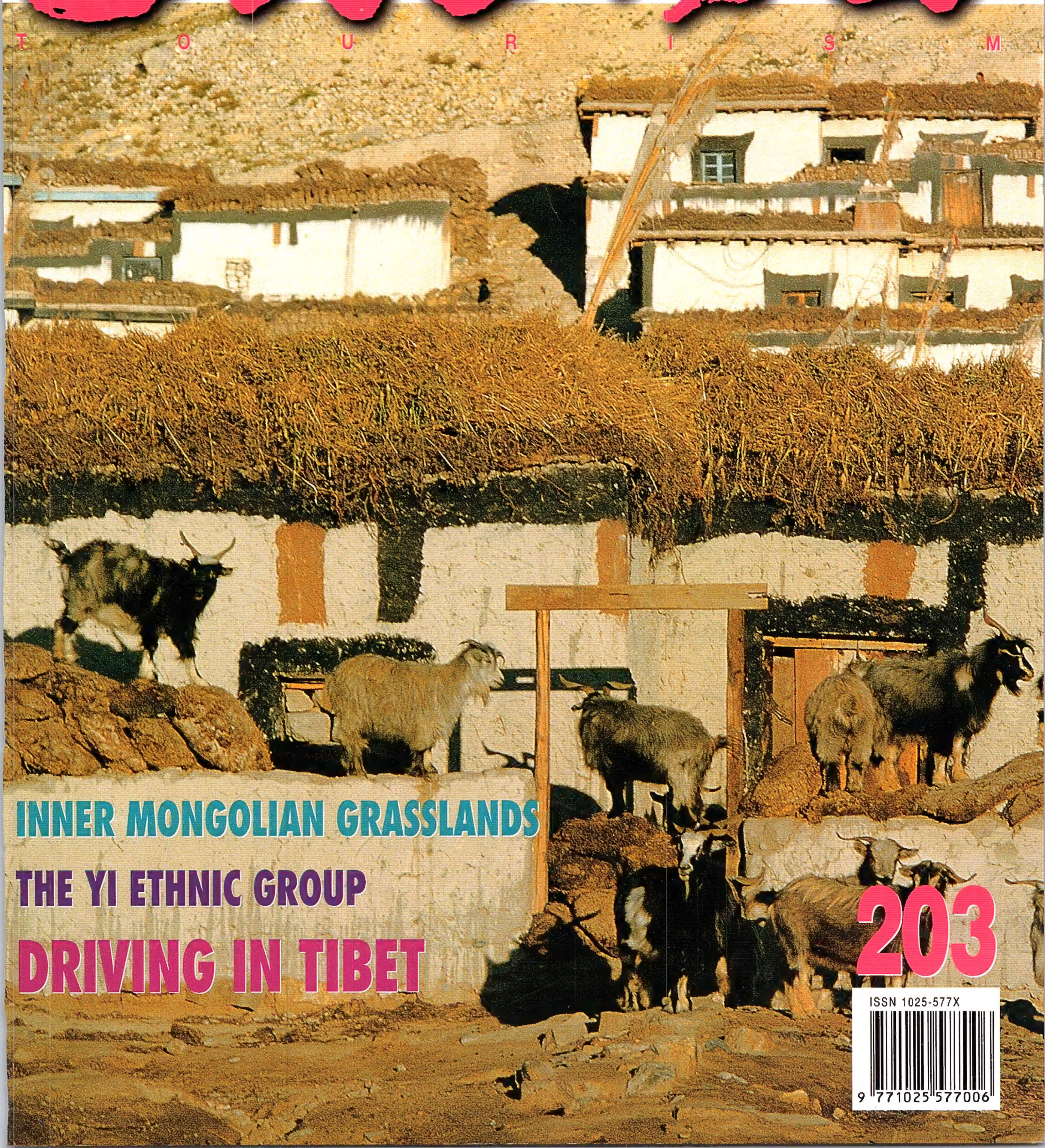

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THE YI ETHNIC GROUP

DRIVING IN TIBET

203

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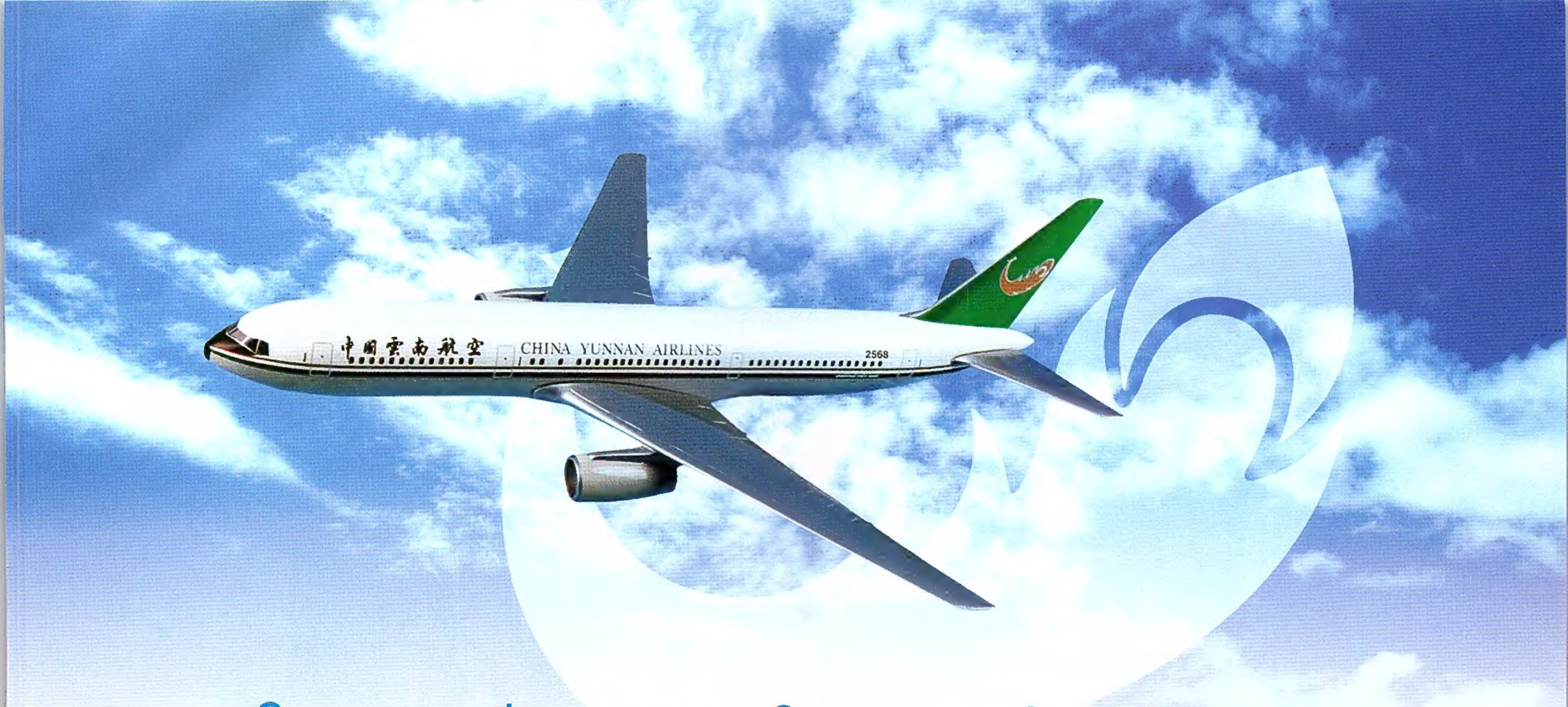

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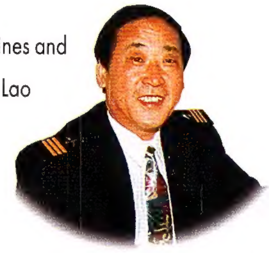

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主樓 Exterior

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*Photo by Wang Miao*

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**Recreation on the Inner Mongolian Grasslands** 14

*Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang*

Lying along China's northern borders, the six Inner Mongolian grasslands stretch 2,400 kilometres from east to west, each with its own unique landscape and each offering the traveller several characteristic recreation programmes: horse or camel riding, building one's own yurt, collecting mushrooms, or visiting a Mongolian family....

## LANDSCAPES

**Longquanyi: the Charm of Spring** 32

*Photos by Zhu Lin Article by Huang Yanhong*

Every spring people living in Chengdu and the surrounding areas rush to Longquanyi, a small town in the provincial capital's suburb, to marvel at the riot of peach and plum blossom covering its hills and fields.

## CHALLENGES

**Trudging Towards the Qomolangma** 38

*Photos by Wang Miao, Zhang Mingji and Chen Xiaoxin*
*Article by Zhang Mingji*

A group of painters and photographers drove all the way from coastal Guangdong Province to the Qomolangma in Tibet, the roof of the world. Overcoming difficulties and crises, they tasted the happiness of the conquerors and collected many unforgettable experiences.

## FROM THE EDITOR

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## LEISURE

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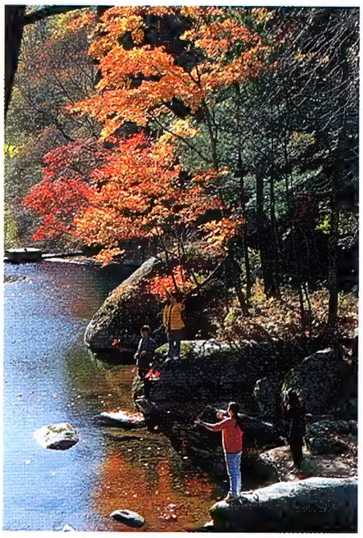
*Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang*



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No. 203 June, 1997

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### "Lieba" Bread from Harbin 72

*Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Yee Ket Choi*

This Russian bread is loved by the locals of Harbin. Every morning people line up to buy the bread, of which only 168 pieces are produced per day. Each loaf weighs two kilograms.

## CULTURE

### Preserving the Cultural Gems 74

*Photos & Article by Li Zhixiong*

Tian Feng, a professor and composer with the Central Philharmonic Orchestra in Beijing, built a school in Yunnan for the purpose of protecting the traditional cultures of the ethnic minorities. At this special school, folk artists are invited to teach and pass on their skills to the younger generation.

## PEOPLES

### The Yi Ethnic Group 66

An introduction to the unique traditions and colourful culture of the Yi people – one of China's ethnic minorities. Their songs and dances have long enjoyed popularity in China.

## EXPERIENCES

### 1,500 Kilometres by Motorcycle 82

*Photos & Article by Joshua Cohen*

On holiday in Gansu, in the Northwest, two Americans drove a Xingfu motorcycle 1,500 kilometres back to Hunan Province where they worked. Their experiences make interesting reading as they pass by a Tibetan monastery, visit a friend in a tiny village, struggle with frequent breakdowns and battle against tiny insects....

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### Panyu – An Ancient City Striving for Modernisation 60

*Photos by Chan Yat Nin Article by Winston Yau*

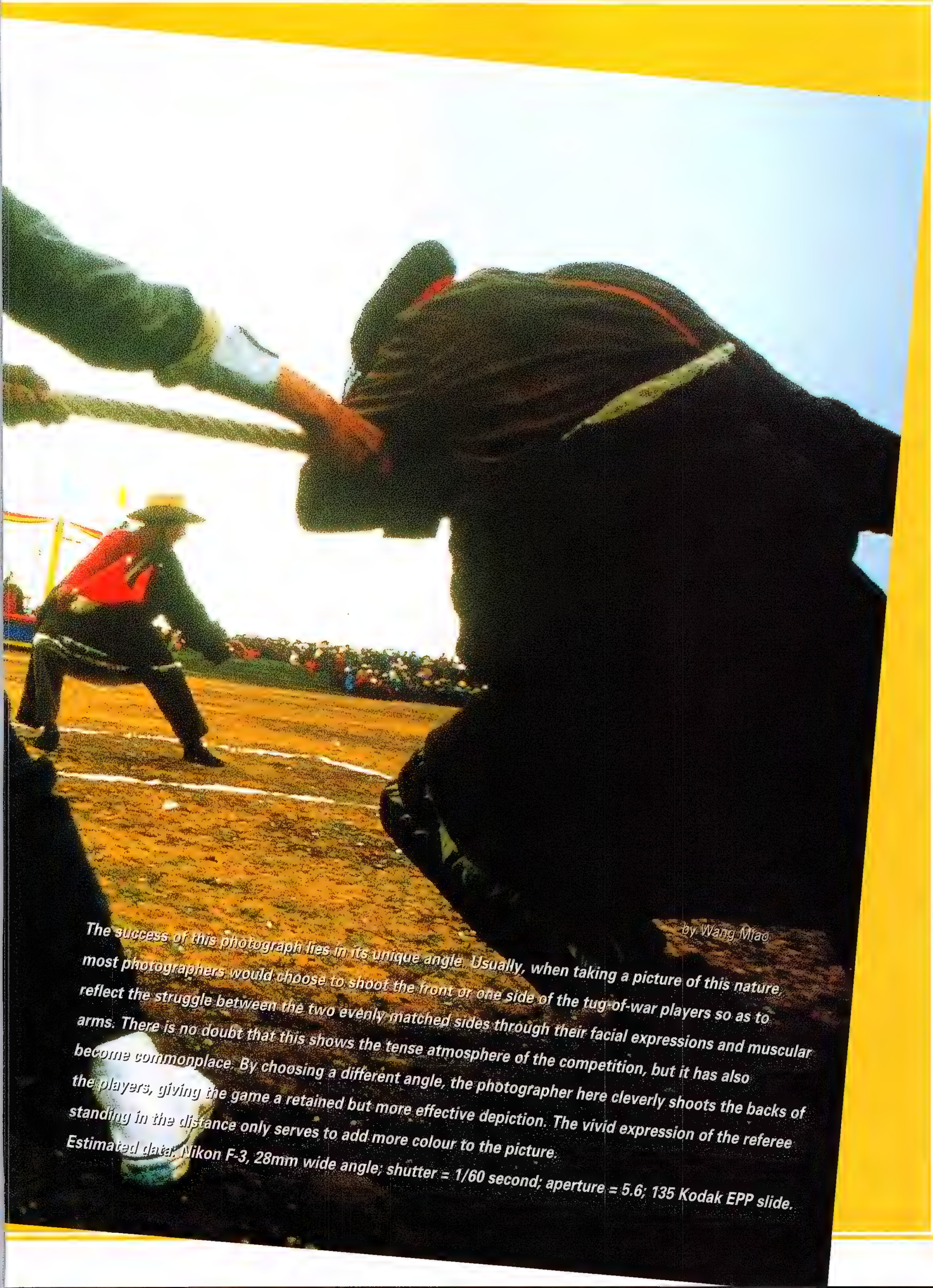
## NEXT ISSUE 88

Correction: Issue No. 202:
Mistakenly our front cover featured the article "Deng Xiaoping's Hometown" without it being published in the issue. We apologise to our readers for any inconvenience caused.

Wang Miao

**Front cover: Tibetan abodes in Dingri**

# PHOTOGRAPHY



by Wang Miao

The success of this photograph lies in its unique angle. Usually, when taking a picture of this nature, most photographers would choose to shoot the front or one side of the tug-of-war players so as to reflect the struggle between the two evenly matched sides through their facial expressions and muscular arms. There is no doubt that this shows the tense atmosphere of the competition, but it has also become commonplace. By choosing a different angle, the photographer here cleverly shoots the backs of the players, giving the game a retained but more effective depiction. The vivid expression of the referee standing in the distance only serves to add more colour to the picture.

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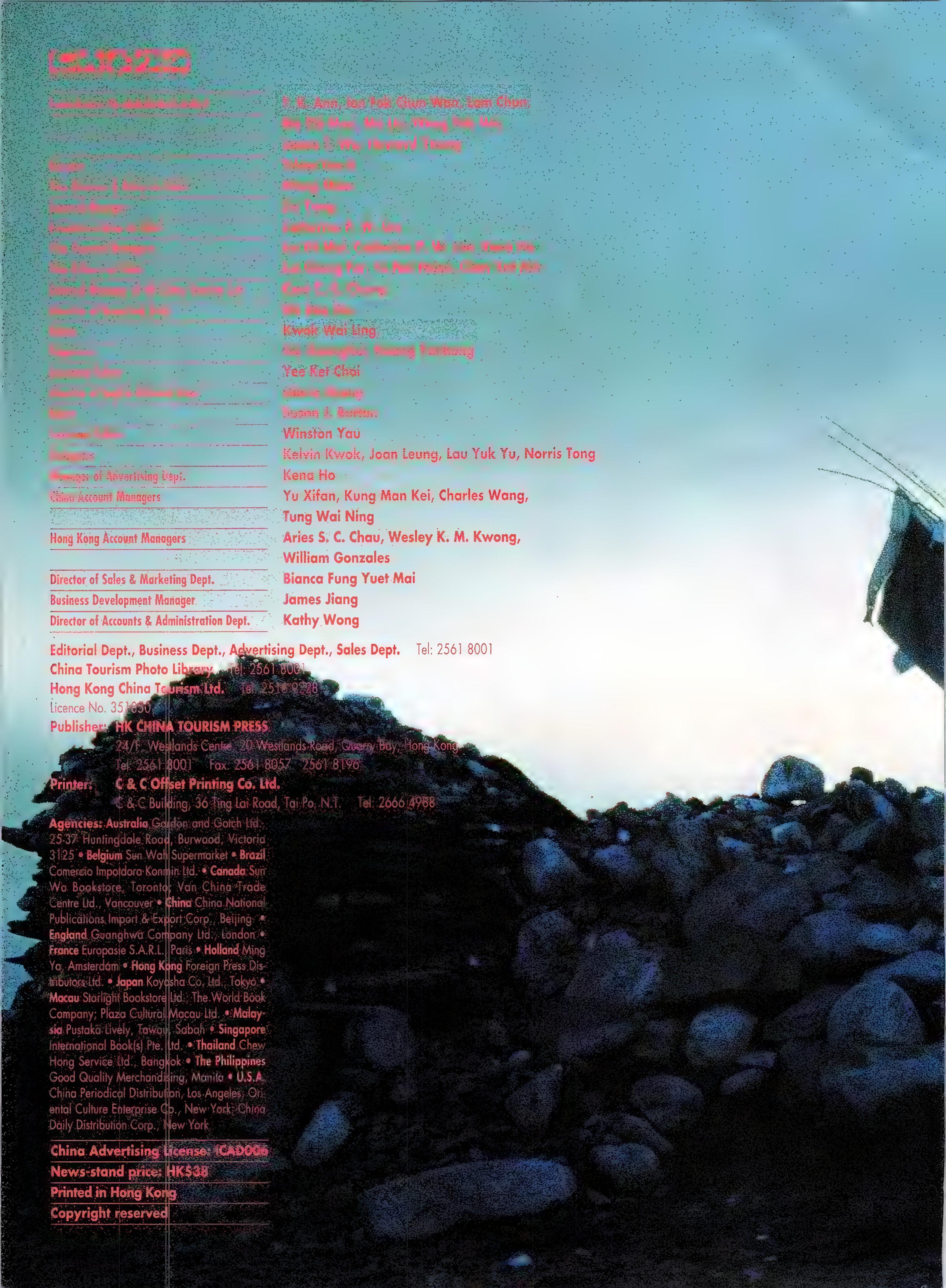

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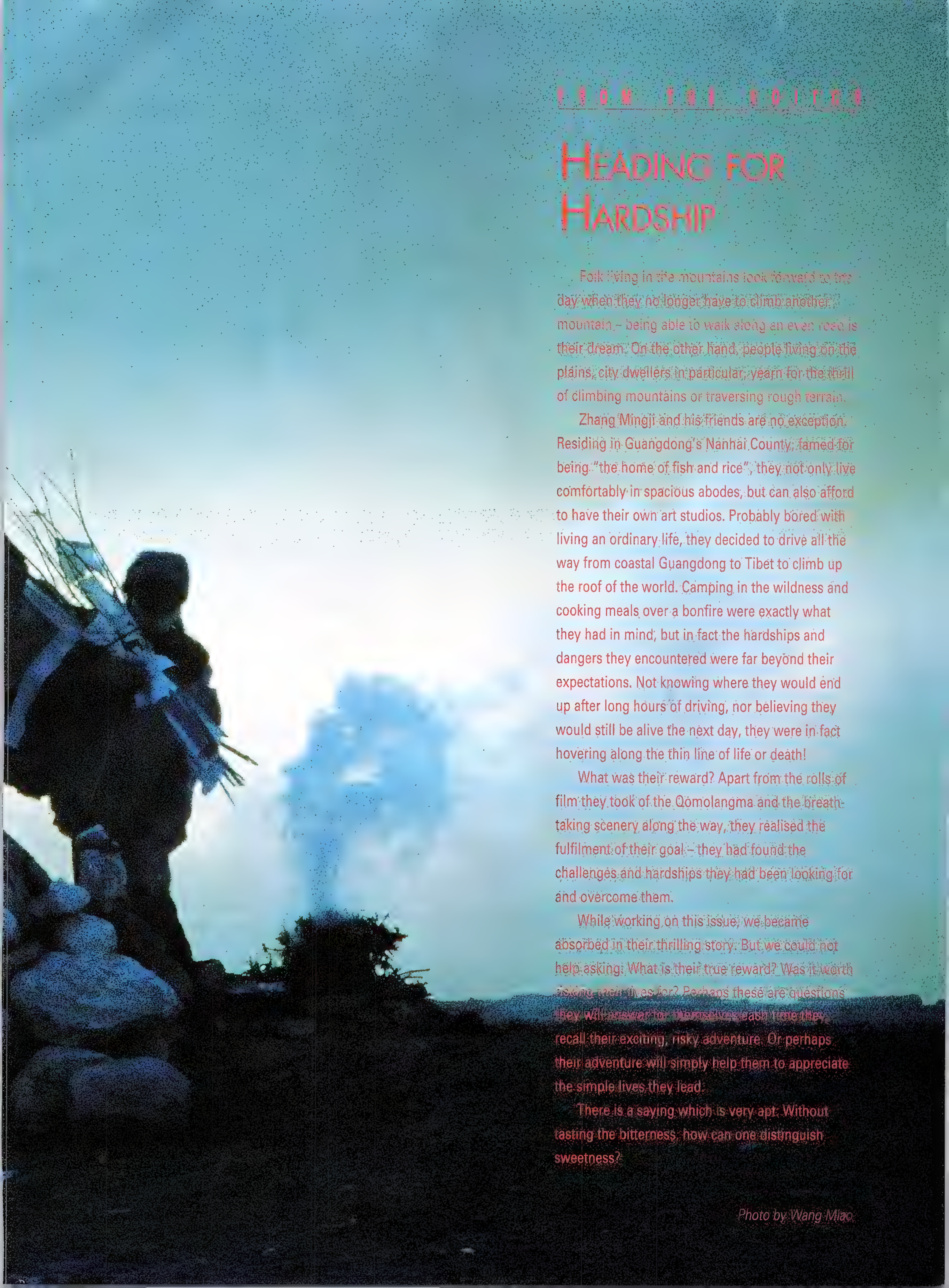


FROM THE EDITOR

# HEADING FOR HARDSHIP

Folk living in the mountains look forward to the day when they no longer have to climb another mountain – being able to walk along an even road is their dream. On the other hand, people living on the plains, city dwellers in particular, yearn for the thrill of climbing mountains or traversing rough terrain.

Zhang Mingji and his friends are no exception. Residing in Guangdong's Nanhai County, famed for being "the home of fish and rice", they not only live comfortably in spacious abodes, but can also afford to have their own art studios. Probably bored with living an ordinary life, they decided to drive all the way from coastal Guangdong to Tibet to climb up the roof of the world. Camping in the wildness and cooking meals over a bonfire were exactly what they had in mind, but in fact the hardships and dangers they encountered were far beyond their expectations. Not knowing where they would end up after long hours of driving, nor believing they would still be alive the next day, they were in fact hovering along the thin line of life or death!

What was their reward? Apart from the rolls of film they took of the Qomolangma and the breath-taking scenery along the way, they realised the fulfilment of their goal – they had found the challenges and hardships they had been looking for and overcome them.

While working on this issue, we became absorbed in their thrilling story. But we could not help asking: What is their true reward? Was it worth risking their lives for? Perhaps these are questions they will answer for themselves each time they recall their exciting, risky adventure. Or perhaps their adventure will simply help them to appreciate the simple lives they lead.

There is a saying which is very apt: Without tasting the bitterness, how can one distinguish sweetness?

*Photo by Wang Miao*

HIGHLIGHTS

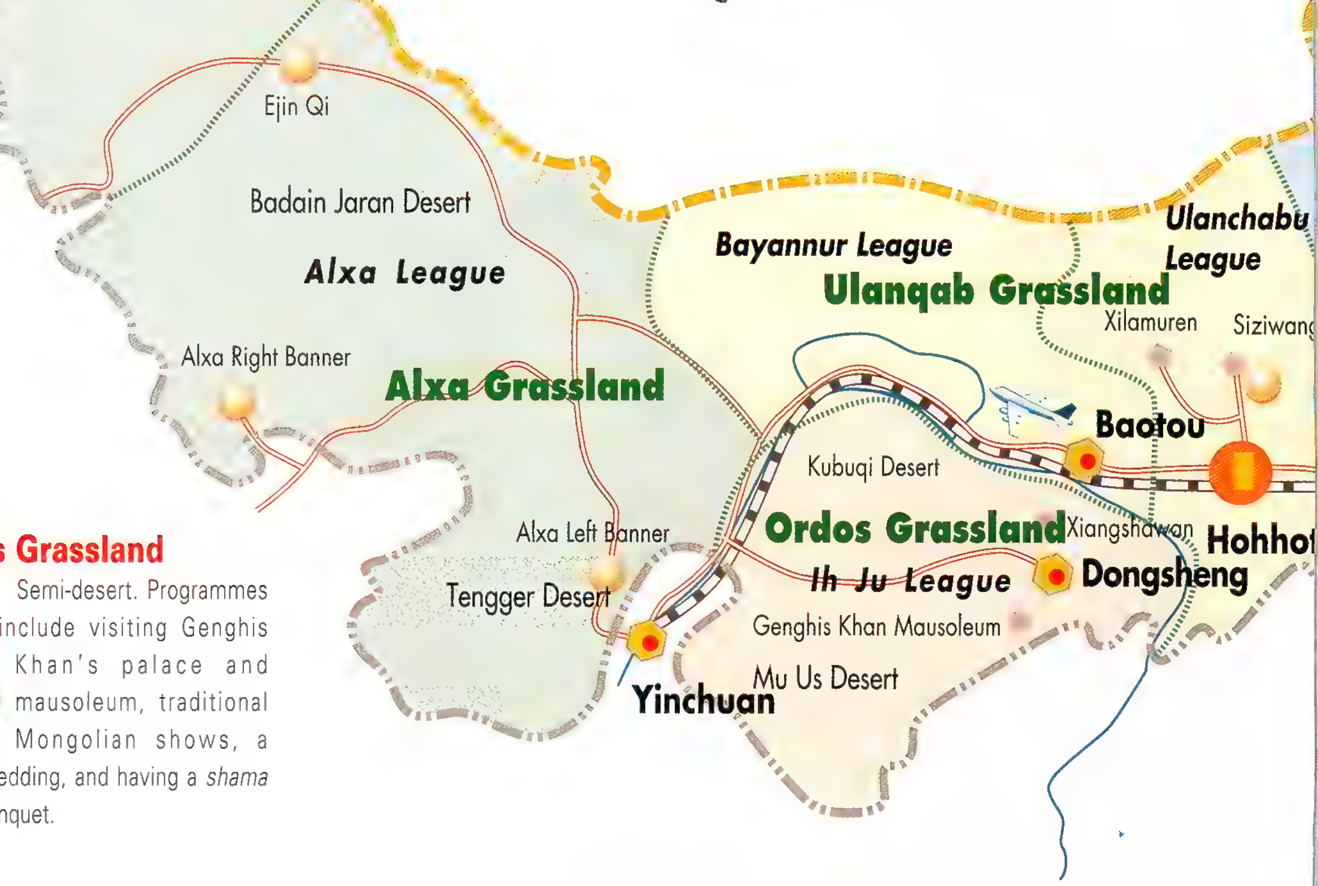
# OVERVIEW OF THE INNER MONGOLIAN

## Alxa Grassland

Vast desert, known as the home of camels. Activities include camel-riding, touring the sand dunes and forests. Specialities: roasted whole lamb and stewed camel humps.

## Ulanqab Grassland

Venue of the yearly Siziwang *nadam*. Scenic spots include Gengen Tala, Huiteng Xile (1,800 metres above sea level), deer and stud farms and Hasu Sea (a natural grassland lake) .



Ejin Qi
Badain Jaran Desert
Alxa League
Alxa Right Banner
Alxa Grassland
Alxa Left Banner
Tengger Desert
Yinchuan
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Ulanqab Grassland
Ulanchabu League
Xilamuren
Siziwang
Baotou
Kubuqi Desert
Ordos Grassland
Xiangshawan
Hohhot
Ih Ju League
Dongsheng
Genghis Khan Mausoleum
Mu Us Desert

## Ordos Grassland

Semi-desert. Programmes include visiting Genghis Khan's palace and mausoleum, traditional Mongolian shows, a wedding, and having a *shama* banquet.

*Photos & Article by Shan Xiaogang*

# GRASSLANDS

## Xilingol Grassland

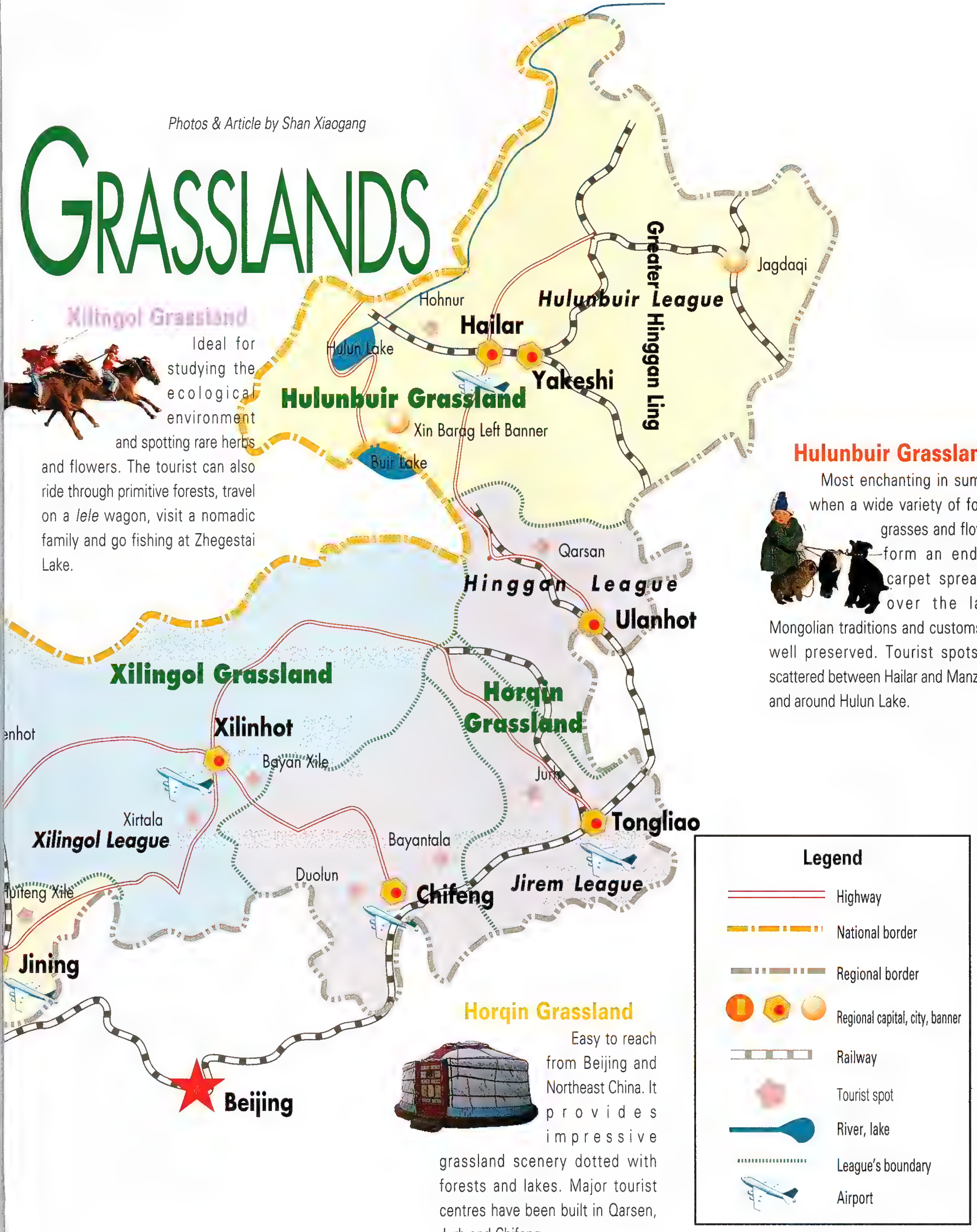
Ideal for studying the ecological environment and spotting rare herbs and flowers. The tourist can also ride through primitive forests, travel on a *lele* wagon, visit a nomadic family and go fishing at Zhegestai Lake.

## Hulunbuir Grassland

Most enchanting in summer when a wide variety of forage grasses and flowers form an endless carpet spreading over the land. Mongolian traditions and customs are well preserved. Tourist spots are scattered between Hailar and Manzhouli and around Hulun Lake.

## Horqin Grassland

Easy to reach from Beijing and Northeast China. It provides impressive grassland scenery dotted with forests and lakes. Major tourist centres have been built in Qarsen, Jurh and Chifeng.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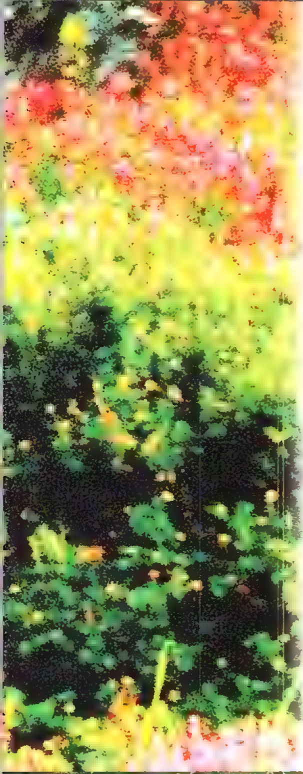
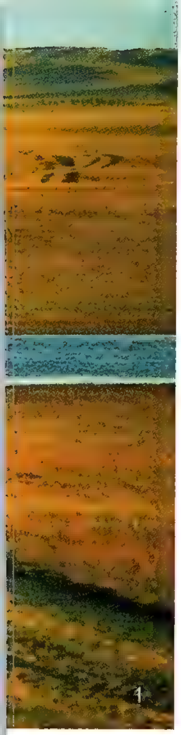
Xilinhot
Bayan Xile
Jurh
Tongliao
Xirtala
Xilingol League
Bayantala
Duolun
Chifeng
Jirem League
Jining
Beijing
Legend
Highway
National border
Regional border
Regional capital, city, banner
Railway
Tourist spot
River, lake
League's boundary
Airport



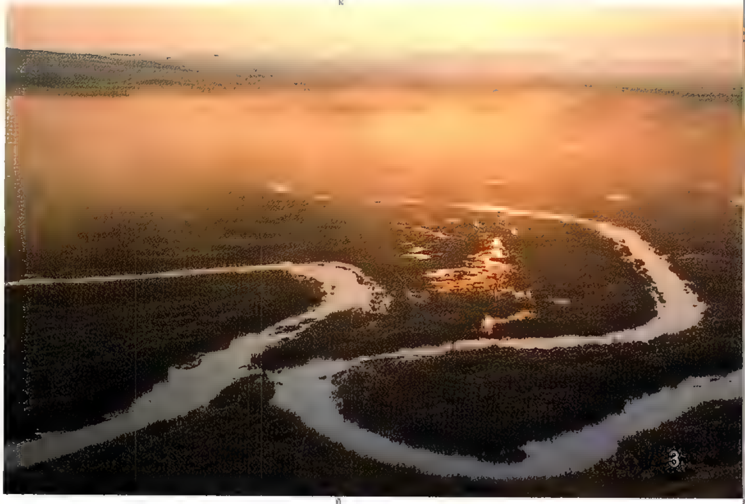
# The Vast Wilderness of the Grasslands



The grassland of Inner Mongolia account for one-tenth of China's total territory, far greater than any of the four other major grasslands in the country. It extends over an area of more than 2,400 kilometres from east to west. It is so vast that it would take two hours to cover the distance in a jet plane; when the sun rises over the grassland in the east, it is still pitch-dark in the west.

Winters are severely dry on the grassland, and the variance of temperature between the eastern and western, as well as between the northern and southern parts of the grassland, is often around 20-30°C; once the temperature even dived below -50°C at the Miandu River in the Greater Hinggan Mountains. Summer is the golden season and also the best season in which to visit the grasslands. With good rainfall and a mild temperature, the grass grows luxuriantly, and the sheep and cattle soon become fat. The autumn season is short, the grass and trees begin to turn yellow in August, and in October the cold north winds begin to arrive.

1. **Grassland arround Chifeng in Autumn (by Wang Miao)**
2. **Ulanqab Grassland in Summer**
3. **Xilingol Grassland snaked with rivers and streams**
4. **The fertile Hulunbuir Grassland (by Ma Yaojun)**



The Inner Mongolian grassland consists of six large grasslands, namely: the Hulunbuir Grassland well-known throughout the world, the Xilingol Grassland where the vegetation is well preserved, the beautiful and fertile Horqin Grassland, the vast Ulanqab Grassland, the semi-arid Ordos Grassland and desert Alxa Grassland. With water decreasing from east to west and heat dropping from south to north, the composition of folk customs, ecological range and vegetation all reflect the gradual changes in zonality.

The **Hulunbuir Grassland** lying in the north-east region has the best grazing land due to its gentle, undulating terrain and plentiful water supply. The nutritious forage grass grows luxuriantly on these plains and that is why the Hulunbuir Grassland has a long history of livestock breeding, particularly famous for its sturdy Sanhe horses and Sanhe cattle. The thick-growing grass also produces the most enchanting landscape spreading like a vast green carpet into the distance, and the fertile soil produces a wide variety of forage grasses which bloom in hundreds of different ways in summer. Hence the people call it the "flowery land".

This region is also one of the birthplaces of the Mongolian ethnic community where the unique Mongolian traditions and customs are well preserved. Other ethic groups also living in the northern areas of the forest-grassland are the Ewenki, Daur and Oroqen, which display still further unique national customs. The areas visited by tourists are concentrated in the pasture areas between Hailar and Manzhouli, as well as around the famous Hulun Lake.

Second to the Hulunbuir is the **Xilingol Grassland**. China's first grassland nature reserve is located here. The terrain contains not only meadow steppe but also other types of pasture land upon which livestock is raised, the most famous breeds include the Ujimqin horses and the fat-tailed sheep. The northern part of the grassland has retained its strong

Mongolian flavour and is considered the "home of wrestling". At its eastern borders the sandy grassland with loosely growing trees offers a unique sight and it is of great ecological value currently under protection. The southern section is famous for its flat-topped mountains formed by volcanic eruptions. The tourist areas are concentrated in the drainage areas of the Xilin River around Xilinhot City.

The meadows of Hulunbuir and Xilingol can be said to be the best of the entire Inner Mongolian grasslands. From July to August, brightly-coloured flowers bloom everywhere on the vast grassland. Herds of horses can be seen galloping across the flatlands and flocks of sheep frolicking under the white

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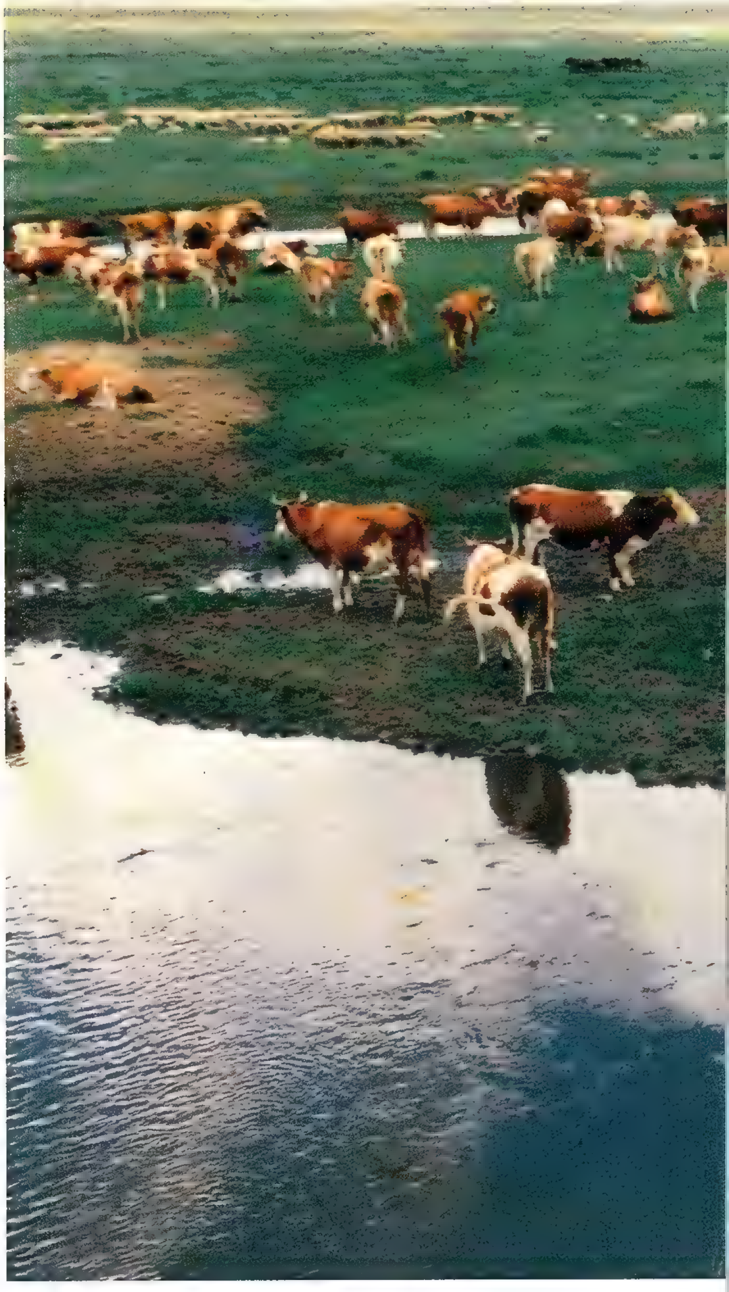
1. Nomads have begun to use motorbikes instead of horses for herding on Ordos Grassland.
2. The *lele* wagon is used as a type of removal van by the nomads. (by Xie Jianzhong)
3. Xilingol Grassland produces many first-rate horses. (by Xie Jianzhong)
4. Poplars grow well on the barren Alxa Grassland. (by Shi Baoxiu)



clouds, while hundreds of Mongolian yurts dot the vast stretches of waving green pasture.

The **Horqin Grassland** is located in the south-east and is the main breeding ground for the Mongolian ox. Moreover, it preserves the customs of the Mongolian people. Because it lies so close to Beijing, Shenyang, Changchun and Harbin, its travel industry is flourishing.

By comparison the meadows of the **Ulanqab Grassland** are inferior. The better regions can be found in the Huiteng Xile Grassland and the Siziwang Banner Grassland. It enjoys a fairly convenient transport system because it is located close to Hohhot and many holiday villages have been built. So it is still a place worth choosing to visit.

The fame of the **Ordos Grassland** belongs to the strong ethnic character of its people – their brightly-coloured costumes and unique customs. It is also famous for its Genghis Khan Mausoleum and Mongolian horses .

At first glance, the **Alxa Grassland** in the west gives the impression of being a desolate, barren land. Yet, the seemingly inedible dry grasses and vegetation growing among the sand dunes manage to sustain the camels known as "boats in the desert", making the grassland famous as China's home of the camels. Not surprisingly, the Mongolians living in these arid grasslands lead a lifestyle very different to those living in the lush grasslands to the east.

1. White camels bred in Alxa Grassland are rarely found elsewhere. (by Wang Aifeng)
2. These cows are "immigrants" from Holland.
3. The strapping horses bred in Ujimqin
4. The nomads herd their sheep all year round.

# RECREATION ON THE GRASSLANDS

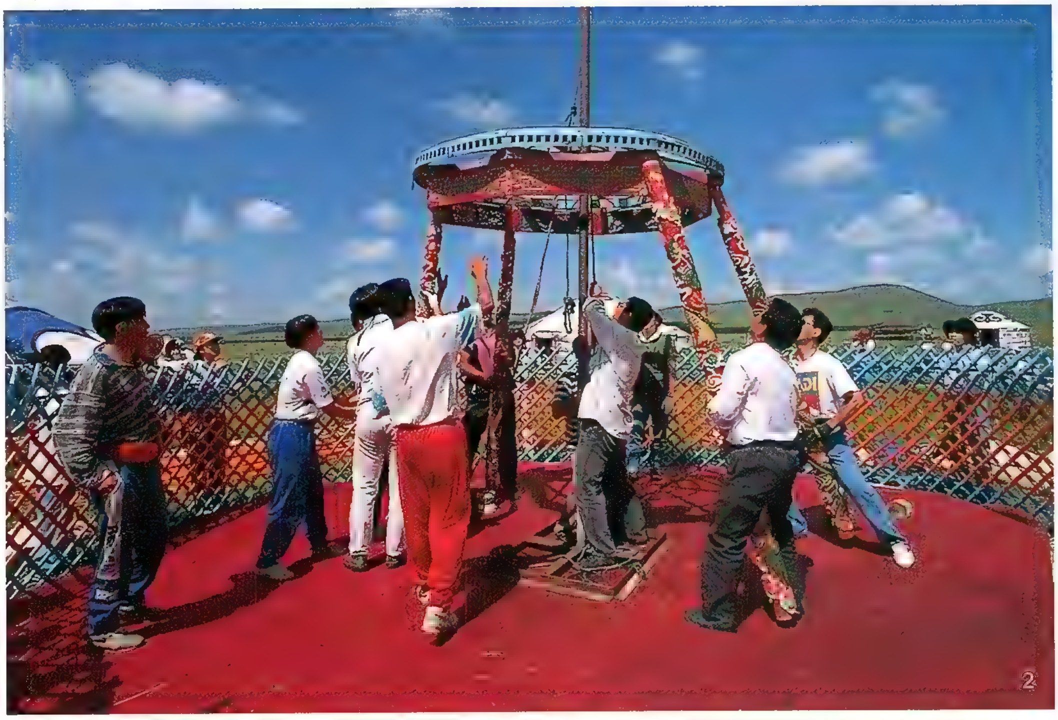
The Mongolian herdsmen live a nomadic life and so for them the yurt is the ideal mobile home. They can be dismantled and transported easily by horse or ox to their new location and then rebuilt in a matter of minutes. In ancient times, the yurt was called *qionglu* or "domed house". It would be a pity to visit the grasslands of Inner Mongolia without spending a night or two under the shelter of the most portable home in the world.

## BUILDING YOUR OWN YURT

The whole experience becomes even more memorable if you build it yourself. Under the careful supervision of the guides one first needs to select the right site, which should be dry and flat. Next, wooden boards are placed on the ground around which a basic frame is erected. The skylight is then hoisted up to the top and further poles are attached to the basic frame to complete the structure. Then, the whole framework is covered with felt which is fastened with cord made from horse hair. One can then stand back and admire one's handiwork.

When the time comes to go to sleep the air inside the yurt is permeated with the sweet smell of the grass and the soil below. Lying in bed one can stare up through the skylight at the sky laden with bright stars and listen to the chorus of night insects. Sleep comes quickly and quietly.

Visitors are welcome to join the yurt experience tour at the Xilingol Grassland in Inner Mongolia from June to September. The cost is 70 yuan per person for one day and one night.



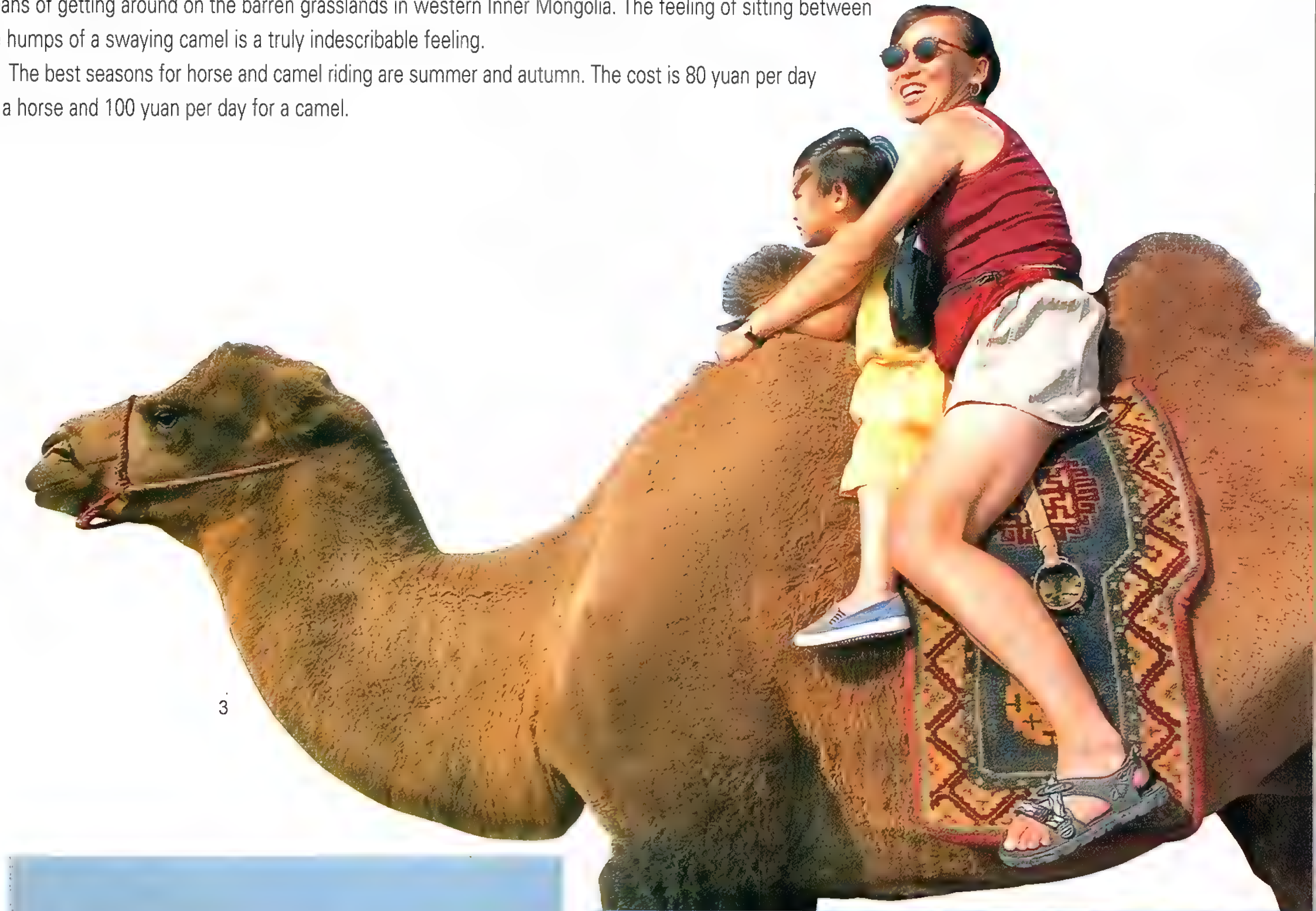
1. **Erecting a Mongolian yurt**
2. **Hoisting the skylight**
3. **The camel is the sedan here.**
4. **The sturdy horses bred on the grassland**
5. **Here come the cowboys! – American tourists ride in Siziwang Banner. (by Chan Yat Nin)**

# HORSE AND CAMEL RIDING

Another experience which should not be missed is riding one of the famous steeds reared on the Inner Mongolian grasslands. Don't worry, you won't be given one of the wild horses to ride, all the horses available to visitors have been specially selected and are very docile.

For a little more excitement, try riding on one of the "boats in the desert" – the camel. This is definitely the best means of getting around on the barren grasslands in western Inner Mongolia. The feeling of sitting between the humps of a swaying camel is a truly indescribable feeling.

The best seasons for horse and camel riding are summer and autumn. The cost is 80 yuan per day for a horse and 100 yuan per day for a camel.



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## CYCLING AND FISHING

Most of Inner Mongolia is made up of gently undulating grasslands therefore it is fairly easy to use a bicycle to wander through the terrain, chasing cows, sheep and horses. If you do fall off, the ground is not hard because it is blanketed by soft, green grass – in fact you might enjoy lying there so much that you won't want to get up!

The freshwater lakes and ponds scattered on the grassland are ideal places for fishing. Not only are the fish easy to catch but there is absolutely no pollution here. The fish tastes delicious either poached or grilled, which you can do for yourself or ask the chef at your guesthouse to cook it for you.

The best period for cycling on the grasslands is between July and August. The cost for renting a bicycle is approximately 80 yuan per day. There are no set fees for fishing. The best time is during the summer and autumn months.

# HORSE RACING, WRESTLING AND ARCHERY

Horse racing, wrestling and archery are events which take place at the Nadam Fair held in summer. These traditional events are considered by the local people to be the "three skills of a brave man". Today, they also provide entertainment for visitors.

The horse competitions are divided into two events: dressage and racing. In the first event all the entrants dress themselves and their horses in stunning outfits. Together, the well-trained horse and its rider display a montage of graceful movements similar to that shown in dressage events in Europe. In the other event, numerous young riders race their horses bare-back. The length of the course varies from a few kilometres to several dozen kilometres. Excited spectators, cheer and shout as the riders race across the finishing line in a cloud of dust.

Wrestling, called *boke in* the Mongolian language, is the most common sport calling for a combination of strength and technique. The wrestlers resemble ancient warriors in their costumes with copper buttons and silver decorations, together with riding boots, colourful belts and scarves. As the contest begins, the wrestlers make their stance and then take powerful steps towards the ring. The rules are very simple. The one who manages to throw his opponent to make his upper body touch the ground is the winner. The wrestling contests can be very thrilling especially between well-matched pairs. One match can last up to an hour. If you are brave enough you might like to put on one of the wresting costumes and have a go yourself!

Archery is one event that everyone can have a go at. Although one cannot guarantee to hit the target every time, it is still fun to try.

*Nadam* shows of varying size are available all over the grasslands in summer. Special performances cost 1,000-3,000 yuan.

**1.** **Angling at Hashuhai**
**2.** **Touring the vast grassland by bicycle is fun.**
**3-6.** **Under the guidance of coach**
**7.** **Let me have a go!**
**8.** **Take your aim!**

# SHEPHERDING

This programme is organised for tourists who have a strong desire to experience the nomadic life of the Mongolians. Visitors team up with the herdsmen and the whole family can join in.

The schedule is as follows: Early morning: watch the sunrise over the grassland; help the herdsmen gather the horses; watch the women milk the cows, prepare butter tea and fry Mongolian pastry – thus preparing a true Mongolian breakfast. After breakfast: fetch water, herd sheep, pick mushrooms, collect cow dung to make a fire and ride a horse. After a Mongolian-style lunch, continue to herd sheep. Afternoon: watch a performance of Mongolian-style wrestling or visit a small-scale *Nadam* Fair, return the cows and sheep to their fold; watch mutton being prepared and cooked, and sausages being made; watch the sunset over the grasslands. Evening: eat pieces of mutton (by hand) and sample the locally-produced spirit or a liquor made from mare's milk; by a campfire listen to ballad-singing by veteran folk to the accompaniment of *matouqin* (a bowed, string instrument with a scroll carved into the shape of a horse's head) and enjoy Mongolian dancing; watch the stars overhead and finally go to sleep in yurts which you have erected with the help of the herdsmen.

Alternatively, move on to another grazing pasture with the herdsmen. The sight of a Mongolian settlement decamping is a truly magnificent sight. The numerous wagons laden with yurts move forward in unison headed by shepherd dogs, while the rear of the procession consists of large herds of cows, sheep and horses. Tourists join the procession either by riding on one of the wagons or riding a horse. The camp sets off at sunrise and stops to rest at sunset. The journey lasts five days at the most and one day at the least. Arrangements to join one of these romantic trips can be made anywhere on the grasslands, however, the best places are the Hulunbuir and Xilingol grasslands and the best period is July to August. Allow 3-5 days. Cost of renting a yurt: 70 yuan per person per day. Cost for renting a horse: 100 yuan per horse per day. Cost for joining the special trip to a new grazing land: 60 yuan per person per day. Other special requests can be made, but the price should be bargained first.

1. **Generosity and steadfastness are the character traits of the Mongolian nomads.**
2. **This family of three owns about a 1,000 head of cattle.**
3. **Traditional costume and accessories worn by Mongolian women**
4. **A memorial ceremony of Genghis Khan held on Ordos Grassland**
5. **It is the tradition of the Mongolian nomads to treat their guests to mutton.**
6. **"Roast sheep's leg" is a famous Mongolian dish.**
7. **Rituals play an important part in a traditional Mongolian feast.**

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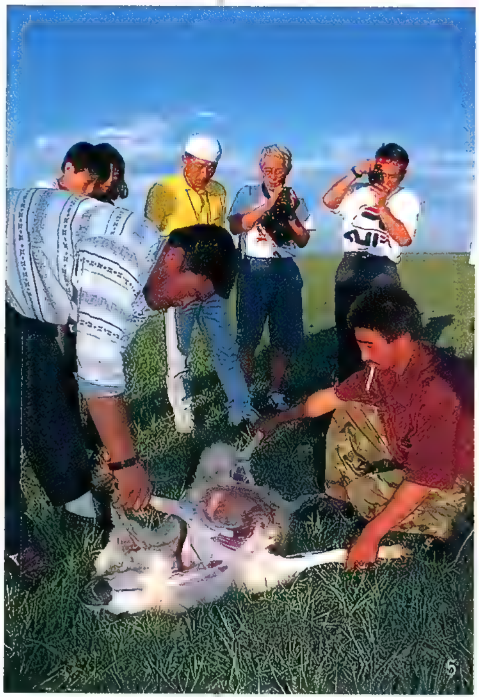
# DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT

Mongolian food is closely related to a nomadic life-style. Unusually, it is divided into three categories: red food, white food and butter tea. Red food includes meat such as whole roasted lamb, rack of lamb, lamb pieces eaten by hand, roast leg of lamb, seared or hot-pot mutton, mutton sausage, and cooked lamb's offal. Of these dishes, the whole roasted lamb and whole rack of lamb which were formerly served at the imperial court, are served when entertaining distinguished guests. The lamb eaten by hand is a homely food. When it is served, each guest helps themselves by using their own knife to cut pieces of meat from the carcass. The mutton produced on the Inner Mongolian grassland does not have the strong smell associated with that from other places, therefore, it should not be missed. Moreover, it might be considered a breach of etiquette by the host if you refuse to eat it. White food refers to the dairy produce eaten at every meal, including fresh milk, yoghurt, dried milk, milk curd, cheese and butter. The milk tea drank by the Mongolians is made by boiling brick tea to which some fresh milk and a small amount of salt is added. Sometimes, the tea is served with butter, fried rice and sugar. It is an indispensable drink when Mongolians receive guests.

Mongolians are, by nature, hospitable and make excellent singers and dancers. During the course of a banquet, the host toasts his guests by asking young men and women to approach the guests holding *hadas* and silver bowls. In such circumstances, it is almost impossible for the guest to refuse the drink, but beware, the drink is very potent. It is possible to taste the Mongolian delicacies and watch the song and dance performances in most areas on the grassland, however, the best place is the Ordos Grassland. Prices for each dishes varies, but roughly are as follows: For organised tours 45 yuan per person; traditional whole roasted lamb 900-1,500 yuan per sheep; whole rack of lamb 300-650 yuan; roast leg of lamb 100-180 yuan; hot-pot mutton 20-50 yuan per person; roast mutton cubes 3-5 yuan each.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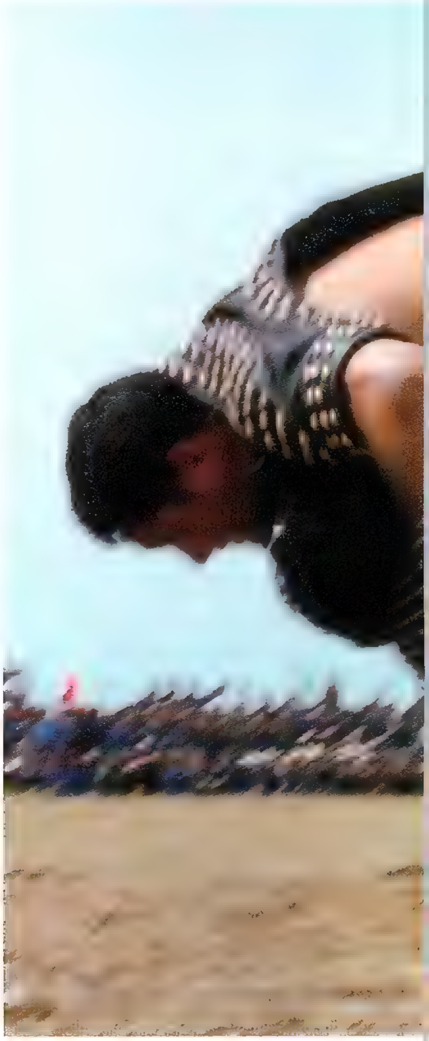
# TRADITIONAL NADAM FAIR

The *Nadam* fair is an annual event usually held in July or August. It is also the golden season on the grassland when the weather is pleasant, the grass is lush and animals are fattened. It is a grand get-together to celebrate bumper harvests. The location of the fair looks like a gigantic campsite which suddenly appears out of nowhere from the boundless grassland. A huge ring is formed by Mongolian yurts, tents, *lele* wagons, trucks and tractors dotted with colourful flags and an endless stream of people, cows and sheep. The most impressive sight is the opening ceremony which resembles a military parade consisting of "fully armed" wrestlers, archers, horse and camel riders as well as motorbikes. The procession stretches for a dozen kilometres.

*Nadam* fairs are held in different venues all over the grasslands, and differ in size according to where they are held: i.e. leagues (prefectures), banners (counties), *sumus* (townships) and *gachas* (villages). The most authentic fairs are those held at the East and West Ujimqin grasslands in the Xilingol League and on the grassland in the Hulunbuir League. In some areas, tourists are charged 30-50 yuan per head, but in others it is free.



*Translated by Li Zhenguo*

1. Mongolian nomads are highly skilled at using a lasso (by Meng Xianyi)
2. The Nadam Grassland Tourist Festival is also a reason for Mongolian nomads to gather together. (by Lü Xiangyou)
3. Girls turning up for the festival are all beautifully adorned. (by Meng Xianyi)
4. Wrestling is one of the highlights at the Nadam Grassland Tourist Festival. (by Xie Jianzhong)
5. In the main, the entrants for the horse race are well-built young lads. (by Xie Jianzhong)

# TRAVELLER'S TIPS

Major Tourist Centres on the Various Grasslands

**Hulunbuir**: There are two scenic areas: The Hoh Nur (meaning 'lake') meadow lies 61 kilometres away from Hailar and is representative of the entire Hulunbuir Grassland. Endless green meadows surround the limpid Hot Nur which resembles ripples of silver. Visitors can ride over the grasslands either on camel or horseback, or take a lele wagon for sightseeing around the lake, or go fishing or hunting.

The Hulun Lake is also called the Dalai Lake. It lies 30 kilometres away from Manzhouli. The Hulun Nur is the largest lake in the Inner Mongolia grassland and the fifth largest freshwater lake in China. It abounds in fish and attracts many wild birds.

**Xilingol**: Mainly the Xiritala and Bayan Xile grasslands are open to visitors. The holiday village in the Xiritala grassland lies 15 kilometres to the south of Xilinhot, close to a state highway and the Xilin River. It is the largest tourist centre with the best facilities on the grassland in Xilingol League. Activities include riding on lele wagons; living inside a Mongolian yurt; camel or horse riding over the grassland; visiting the families of nomadic herdsmen; tasting the local delicacies; enjoying performances of national song and dance at camp fire parties. The centre is open all year round.

The holiday village in the nature reserve on the Bayan Xile grassland is situated by the Zhagestai Lake which is well-known for a special species of fish. Situated some 75 kilometres away from Xilinhot, it is a rather primitive and secluded summer resort offering activities such as studying the ecological environment and spotting rare herbs and flowers; picnicking inside Mongolian yurts; horse riding through primitive forests in the area; sightseeing and fishing at the Zhagestai Lake. The best season to visit is from June-September.

**Horqin**: The major tourist areas are the Qarsen grassland in Hinggan League, Zhuri River in the Jirem League, and the Bayantala, Qigan and Dalai Nur within the boundaries of Chifeng City.

At Qarsen one can stay in a holiday village surrounded by lake, grassland and forest where one can choose from a wide variety of activities such as hill climbing, sheep or cattle herding, fishing or collecting mushrooms. Guest yurts have been built for tourists at Jurh.

The grassland can be reached from Beijing by air or train to alight in Chifeng, Tongliao and Ulanhot.

**Ulanqab**: The grassland surrounds Hohhot City, and its tourism areas include Gegentala, Xilamuren, Huiteng Xile and Hasu Sea. Gegentala is a grassland travel centre built with investments from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regional government. It is one of the largest and best-equipped tourist resorts on the Inner Mongolian grassland. The annual Nadam Fair of the Siziwang Banner is held on

## THE PROGRAMME OF THE `97 NADAM GRASSLAND TOURIST FESTIVAL

Following is the programmes of the `97 Nadamu held in Inner Monglia from July 25 to August 10.

A series of leisure activities will be arranged in Hashu Sea Tourist Village from July 25 to August 10.

*Nadamu* Grassland Tourist Festival Fair of Siziwang Banner will open at Siziwang Banner, Ulanchabu League on July 25 and last for 7 days. Activities: opening ceremony, wrestling, horse-racing, archery, song and dance performances, campfire party and ritual sacrifice, touring the grassland on horseback, a visit to a herdsman's household, tasting ethnic dishes and business activities, etc.

From July 20 to August 20, special folk song and dance performances and a theatrical performance will be arranged in the Art Academy of Inner Mongolia, Hohhot.

From July 20 to August 20, guests will be offered a *hada* and wine in the Mongolian way; dining on whole roast sheep, roast sheep's leg, fried millet, milk tea, dairy products and other Mongolian food, etc.

From July 25 to August 10, Saihantala Tourist Village of Baotou City and Xilamuren Grassland Tourist Spot of Damao Banner: horse racing, camel riding, touring in a *lele* wagon, wrestling, archery, desert culture and art show, Ordos wedding show, tasting ethnic food, attending a ritual sacrifice at an *aobao*, sightseeing, etc.

the grassland 128 kilometres to the north of Hohhot.

Xilamuren is a grassland resort situated by a river at the foot of a mountain, close to the famous Puhui Temple. The holiday resort is well-known for the large number of Mongolian yurts it has on offer, including 30 modern, star-rated ones. It is situated 90 kilometres to the north of Hohhot and bus service is available from the capital city of the region.

Huiteng Xile (meaning cold plateau) lies more than 1,800 metres above sea level, and is the highest point on the Inner Mongolian grassland. As well as visiting the deer and stud farms nearby, the visitor can expect to see magnificent views across unique grassland landscape. The area is situated 135 kilometres to the north-east of Hohhot.

Hasu Sea is a natural lake which has long been known as "West Lake" to the north of the Great Wall. In the holiday village set by the lake, there are both European-style wooden cabins and traditional Mongolian yurts. In addition there are a large variety of recreational facilities. Activities include sightseeing around the lake, fishing, horse riding, dining at an all-fish banquet or a whole lamb feast.

**Ordos**: The major tourism resorts are Xiangshawan (Humming Sand Dures) and Genghis Khan's Palace. The Xiangshawan tourist centre is located at the northern edge of the Hobq Desert. The fairly well-equipped centre provides activities for tourists who want to venture deep into the desert of Xiangshawan. Other programmes include camel or horse riding through the desert. It is situated 50 kilometres to the west of Baotou.

Genghis Khan's Palace for temporary lodging lies to the south-east of the Genghis Khan Mausoleum. The architecture of the palace buildings are magnificent. The boarding and dining facilities are pretty good; there are also a large collection of beautiful local handicrafts to choose from as well as a great variety of local delicacies to taste. The most interesting activity programmes are the grand sacrifice-offering ceremony at the Genghis Khan Mausoleum, watching performances of the Ordos traditional Mongolian songs and dances, a Mongolian wedding ceremony and dining at a banquet in the style of the Yuan Dynasty palace – the *zhama* banquet.

**Alxa**: The major activities here are exploration trips into the Badain Jaran Desert, including visiting the Yanfu Temple, visiting herdsmen's homes; dining on Alxa whole lamb roast and camel humps; riding camels into the Badain Jaran Desert to see the sand dunes, oasis and desert lakes, and learn about the unique Mongolian customs of western Inner Mongolia.

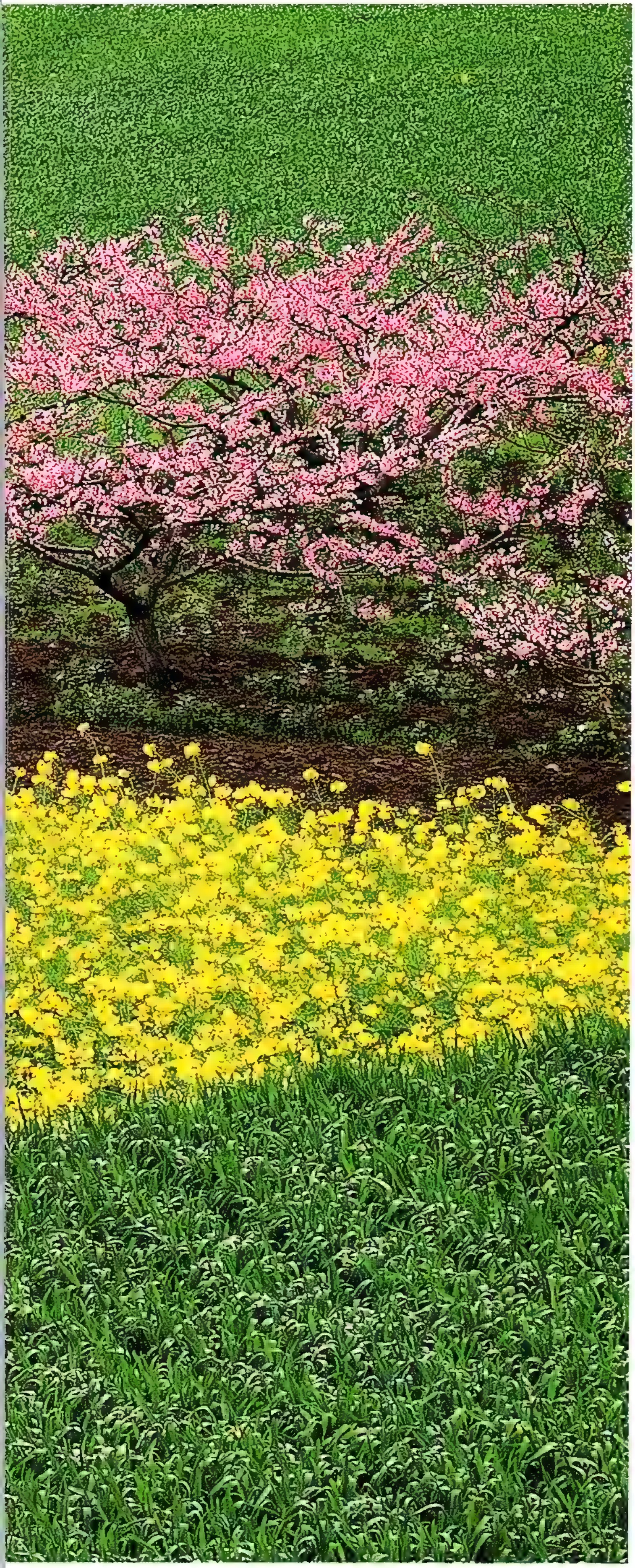
From July 25 to August 10 at the Genghis Khan Mausoleum: Genghis Khan memorial ceremony, exhibition of Mongolian historical relics, Ordos wedding show and *Zama* banquet (handed down from the palace of the Yuan Dynasty and arranged by special request of the tour group); at the Humming Sand Dunes: scenic tour of the desert by camel or in a sand-sail boat, sand treatment, sand sliding, parachute gliding, desert campfire party and tasting Ordos food.

From July 25 to August 10, a folk tour will be organised in Xilingole League. Activities: wrestling, horse-racing, archery, lassoing; folk song and dance, campfire party and ritual sacrifice.

The closing ceremony of Nadamu Grassland Tourist Festival of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region will take place at Xilamuren Grassland Tourist Spot of Damao Banner, Baotou City on August 10.

On July 25, July 30 and August 5, small-scale Nadamu Fairs will be held in Bayantala and Mastala Grassland Tourist Spots, Right Banner, and in Dalainor Sumu, Keshketen Banner respectively. Activities include: a horse race, archery, wrestling, folk song and dance, exhibition of folk handicrafts and trade fair, etc.

In early August, Grassland Tourist Festival & Manzhouli Trade Conference will be held in Hulunbuir League. Main festival activities include: traditional guest reception, wrestling, horse racing, horse taming, folk song and dance, a campfire party; trade conference.



# LONGQUANYI:

## THE CHARM OF SPRING

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

It is spring again and the usually quiet town of Longquanyi suddenly comes alive.

Seemingly following a silent decree from heaven, a tide of flowers washes over the whole area. Waves of peach and plum blossoms surge up and down the slopes in a riot of red and white. And, a stream of people and vehicles eddy back and forth across the fields.

Not long ago, the local farmers were puzzled by the arrival of their urban guests: "Could all these people really travel such long distances simply to admire these common field plants?" But each year the visitors kept coming, swelling in number, and as a result the village grew into a small town. Now, the farmers look at the land with a new perception, through the eyes of their visitors, and consequently they have learned to take advantage of the season, too. Like the arrival of the spring flowers, restaurants, teahouses and grocery shops emerge everywhere almost over night – spring not only brings Longquanyi flowers, but also prosperity.

Longquanyi is located 20 kilometres from Chengdu. Having heard people talk about it on several occasions, I finally decided to visit the place for myself. With me were several friends and my young daughter who was worried about how she was going to complete her school assignment, a composition entitled "Looking for Spring".

We entered the sea of colour and I became intoxicated. Immediately, my daughter set off in search of spring with a pen and a notebook in hand; two photographer friends were lured deeper into the heart of the blossoming orchard following the patterns of colour. The rest of us sat

among the peach trees, drinking wine and admiring the beauty of nature. Probably because of the wine, we all felt the urge to compose a few lines of poetry. But as we read our efforts out loud to each other, as the ancient scholars once did, we all felt ashamed – how could our clumsy compositions be called "poems" while the brilliant lines of our intellectual ancestors were still alive in our minds? At that moment, we decided that the best entertainment for each of us was to sit there in silence and let our imaginations take flight.

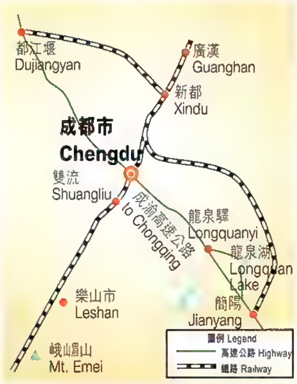
Many ancient poems depicting spring were rather pessimistic. One line Yan Shu composed, "Seeing the flowers falling, I feel so helpless" became famous because of the sadness it conveyed; Ouyang Xiu was also very sad when he wrote, "Closing my door at dusk, I have no idea how to hold spring". Wang Guan sounded more positive when he wrote: "If you catch up with spring south of the Yangtse, you must stay with it". However, considering there was no airline service during his time, this was a hard wish to realise. The most gallant poet was Xin Qiji, who gave his command to spring like a general to his soldiers: "Stop, you, Spring. Don't you know there is no return path for flowers and grasses?" Obviously,

these ancient literati suffered a gnawing pain during spring. A season they loved too much and they constantly tortured themselves by contemplating its briefness. In contrast, the people today have a more carefree approach – flying kites, taking photos and picnicking – they simply indulge themselves in spring.

Just then, I realised that spring should not be taken seriously, otherwise it just becomes a section of time with a warm climate; neither should it be treated romantically – one need not weep for its hasty departure....

Spring is a pleasant mood which encourages a light-hearted feeling – if you listen carefully to the soft murmuring of a spring wind, you may find many inspiring messages. Spring is also a fragrant incense, a perfume blended with the scent of flowers, trees, grasses, the earth, and the air.

When the photographers in our party returned they were fully satisfied with their accomplishments, declaring proudly, "We've taken the most beautiful pictures!" When my daughter returned I asked whether she had found spring, she replied, "Why, we are all in spring."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Longquanyi
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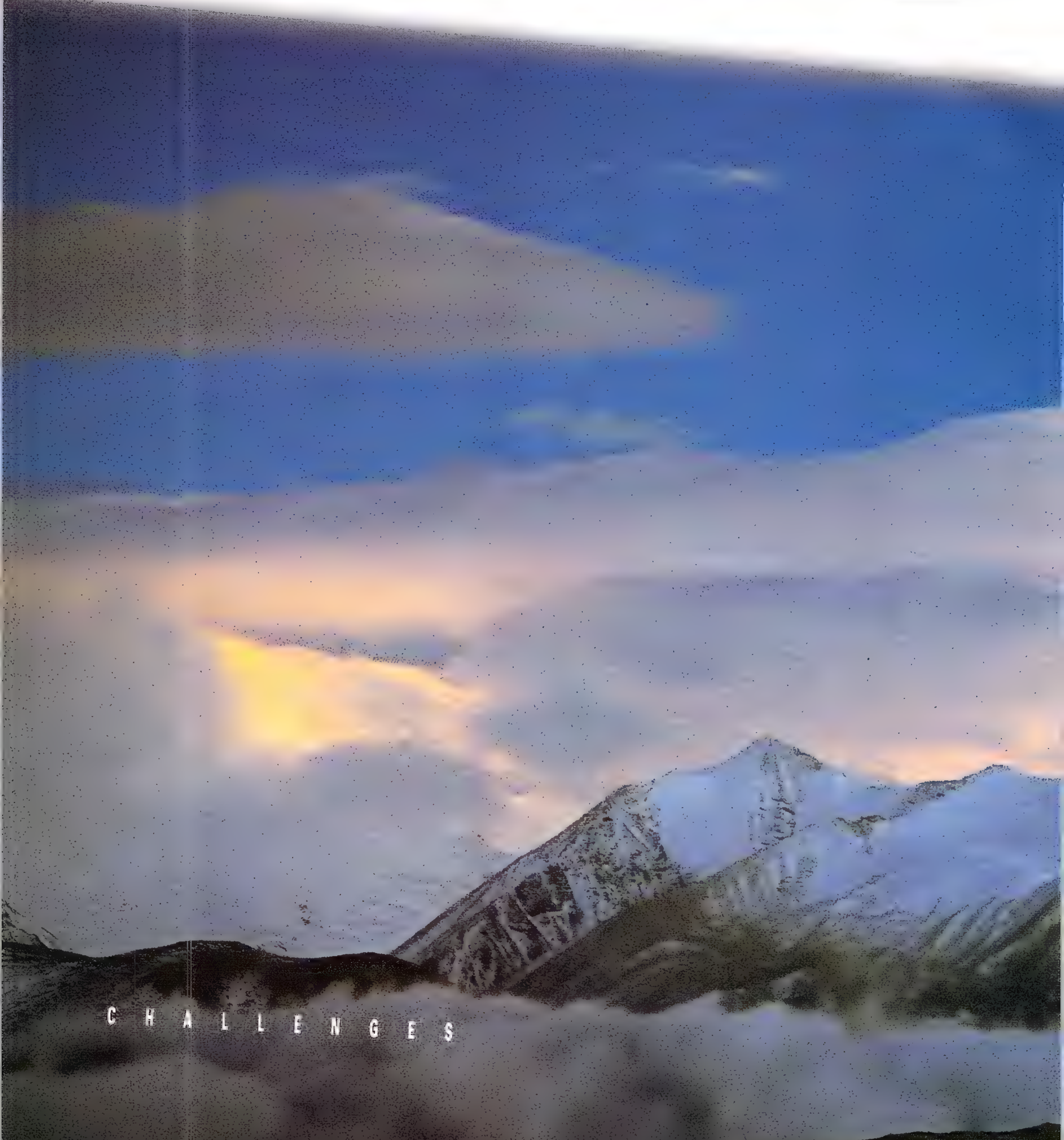
Longquan Lake
樂山市
Leshan
簡陽
Jianyang
峨嵋山
Mt. Emei
圖例 Legend
高速公路 Highway
鐵路 Railway

**四川龍泉驛旅遊示意圖**
**Location Map of Longquanyi in Sichuan**

# TRAVELLER'S TIPS

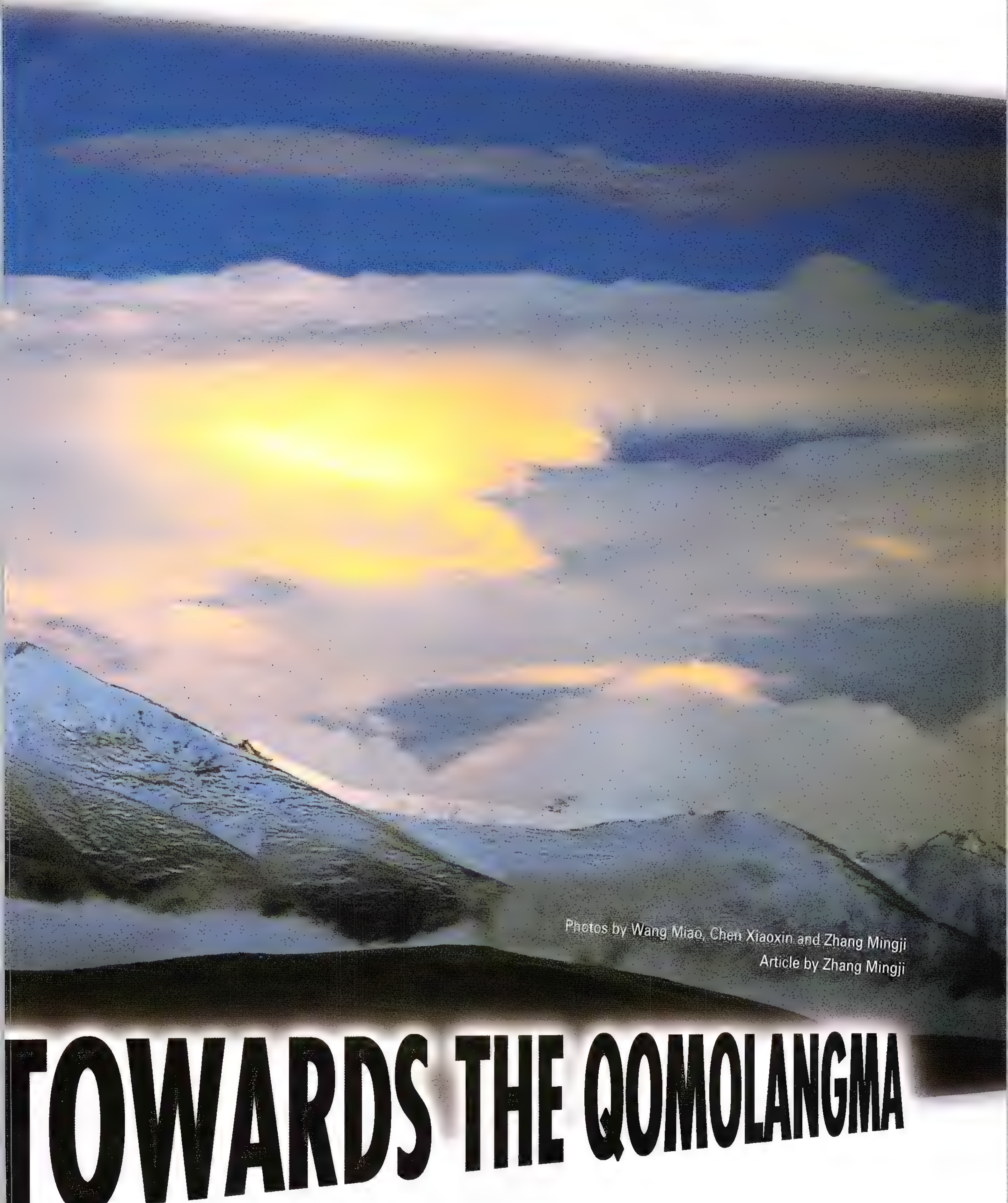
Longquanyi lies in the south-eastern suburbs of Chengdu, 22 kilometres from the city centre. A riot of peach and plum blossom cover the area every year during March and April, attracting throngs of people from Chengdu and the surrounding areas. In the hills there are also Baigongyan, Longquan Lake and Sancha Reservoir where one can go boating.

Take a special-line bus at the Shuangqiaozi or North Stop of the Chengdu Railway Station to travel along the Chengdu-Chongqing Highway, you arrive at Longquanyi about half an hour later. There are alternative bus lines but the journey time may be much longer due to traffic jams, sometimes as much as two hours.



CHALLENGES

# TRUDGING



Photos by Wang Miao, Chen Xiaoxin and Zhang Mingji
Article by Zhang Mingji

# TOWARDS THE QOMOLANGMA

*Compelled by a passion, Zhang Mingji and three art-loving friends from Nanhai, Guangdong Province decided to spend a few days getting lost in the embrace of nature. They chose a challenging route which took them all the way through Guangxi and Yunnan provinces to the Autonomous Region of Tibet. Their ultimate destination was Mount Qomolangma Peak – dubbed the planet's third polar region. The journey was fraught with dangers and many hardships. They returned 33 days later, hardly believing they had emerged unscathed. "It seems as though each of us has left a piece of our hearts behind on that magical plateau," one of them reflected.*

*Reluctantly, we have had to skip their experiences in Yunnan, Guangxi and part of Tibet due to a shortage of space but we hope you are still able to appreciate the trepidation and joys of this part of their adventure from Qamdo to Mount Qomolangma.*

*– The Editor*

Quite often we found ourselves rambling gingerly along a red-earth road

## *Our First Night Camping*

July 12. The jeep sped across the Bangda Grassland at an altitude of 4,200 metres above sea level. The snow-bound mountains beyond the Nangla Mountain Pass looked deceptively low and tame but whenever we stopped to take a few snapshots, we could already feel the drag on our legs and found ourselves gasping for air.

At four p.m. we arrived at Qamdo, the third largest city of Tibet and the seat of the prefecture by the same name. Qamdo, which literally means "where two rivers meet", sprawls strategically on the trunk highway which connects Chengdu in the south and Lhasa in the north. Feeling homesick, we decided make a long-distance call back home to at least let our families know we had survived our first five days. We waited in the local post office for an entire hour but the line refused to connect.

We left Qamdo and drove west for 50 kilometres. We pitched tent for the night by the side of the road. The boiling point of water is lowered by the high altitude and thin air making it impossible to cook anything, however, we had brought a pressure cooker with us and managed to produce a pot of rice with canned dace and cured pork, and another pot of rice porridge. When darkness fell at 9.30 p.m. we ducked inside our tent, unfolded our water-proof blankets and squeezed into our sleeping bags. Content, we felt as if we were wallowing in the comfort of a presidential suite.

## *A Captivating Landscape*

July 13. It was 8 a.m. when our jeep climbed over the Zhugla Mountain Pass perched 4,700 metres above sea level. The pass joined up with State Highway 317 which turned out to be a red, muddy trail so slippery that we were obliged to proceed at the lowest speed. A turbulent river raced past on one side of the road and we were conscious that the slightest lapse of attention could have disastrous consequences. To make matters worse, the road had long been obliterated by the rain, and we quite often found ourselves rambling gingerly along the pebbly bed of a mountain stream.

Now and then we would have to cross streams and shoals of water without knowing how deep the water was. Each time we prayed that the jeep's motor would not get flooded. Sometimes, luckily, we caught up with a local truck just ahead of us and were able to be guided by its path, but most of the time we had to rely on our own luck and judgement. How we wished our jeep were amphibious!

By the end of the day, we were pleasantly surprised to learn we had covered 160 kilometres. Despite the jolts and perils of the road, we were rewarded with what we believed to be the most spectacular scenery since we'd set foot in Tibet. The mountain slopes along the way were embroidered with patches of green *qingke* barley and golden rape flowers. The hills rolled in voluptuous curves for as far as the eye could see. Mountain villages nestled amidst carpets of violet flowers, and thin wisps of smoke rose from kitchen chimneys. Yaks and sheep returning from a day's grazing in the meadows looked like black and white pearls strewn on a mammoth green tapestry. A clear azure sky embellished with fleecy clouds added the finishing touch. The loveliness of the landscape was captivating.

Suddenly, the wind rose and it began to drizzle. Our jeep had hardly began to pick up speed when we found our way blocked by seven or eight boulders which had slid down the mountain. The largest must have weighed two tons and the smallest at least 200 kilogrammes. We

**Previous page: The magnificent snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas (by Wang Miao)**

**1. Driving across a river where the bridge has been washed away by the floods (by Zhang Mingji)**

1

had to strain every muscle to remove three smaller boulders so that our jeep could pass. "It seems that where there are good sights there are no good roads," Ah Li mused.

## A Boy Standing in the Rain

July 14. Noon time. The smell of sulphur dioxide assaulted our nostrils as soon as our jeep trundled across a stone-strewn stream. We immediately pulled over to watch the hot water gurgling out of four springs. We longed to take a bath but thought better of it, sensing that the cliff on the other side of the road might collapse at any time.

Having climbed over the Xoleg Mountain Pass at 4,830 metres above sea level we pulled into a col and began to build a fire. The canned dace flavoured with fermented soya beans that we had brought from Shunde, Guangdong Province, obviously could not stand the change in atmospheric pressure. All the cans had burst open, spilling the gravy into a dirty plastic pail. We craved for some green vegetables of any kind, but during the whole of the 1,000 kilometres we had travelled so far we had not seen a single vegetable garden.

Leaving someone behind to prepare lunch, the other four of us went out in search of something better to eat. Ah Li volunteered to catch a few of the rats which were running about the grassy mountain slope, but as soon as they saw him approach, stone in hand, they all managed to disappear. Exhausted, Ah Li collapsed on the ground.

I had gathered a huge pile of pinkish brown mushrooms which looked beautiful and delicious but none of us dared eat – they were probably poisonous.

Night had fallen when we reached Sog County at 9 p.m. We found a restaurant and devoured a huge meal of pumpkin, cabbage and tomato, all shipped in from Sichuan and Yunnan. Afterwards, we went in search of a hotel for the night. It had begun to rain again. Just ahead of us our headlights caught sight of a young boy standing by a bridge. He was waving frantically. It turned out the bridge had been washed away by the flood. By the time we had made a detour, we saw the boy still there trying to warn the oncoming traffic.

## The Chantang Plateau

July 15. We drove out of a mountain valley and reached the famed Chantang Plateau in northern Tibet, a vast undulating grassland. The scene would be monotonous were it not for the yaks and sheep studding the lush meadows. The entire stretch of land, as far as the eye could see, was sequestered in peaceful repose.

The Xining-Lhasa Highway south of Nagqu was in excellent condition, allowing our jeep to travel 80 kilometres per hour. The weather, however, alternated between sunshine and rain daubing the sky with rainbows. The broad vistas before us was of rolling countryside ending in the distance with a blue smudge of snow-capped mountains.

As dusk settled, we pitched our tent at the foot of the Samdainkangsang Mountain, cocooned in pristine white snow. We had barely retreated to the comfort of our tent when the wind began to howl fiercely. Dust swirled about in the wind, and stones were sent hurtling through the air. The tent shook violently. Protected by our overcoats which we had thrown over our heads, Ah Li and I rushed out and hammered the iron pegs home with stones. We also used the rope

from our luggage rack to secure every loose end of the tent into place. By the time we had driven our jeep to the lee side, our limbs were frozen numb and our jaws were so stiff that they refused to work. When we ducked back inside the tent, hail began to batter the ground. I zipped up the slits of the tent and begged heaven for mercy. All the while the tiny electric torch hanging from the ceiling of the tent shook violently, casting us and the cramped space about us, under a crazy pattern of ghostly shadows.

We were soon to realise the hazards of sleeping 4,800 metres above sea level – altitude sickness soon took hold. We slept fitfully, our chests felt heavy and congested, and our heads throbbed constantly. However, our discomfort momentarily gave way to a feeling of wonder and excitement at the realisation that we were sleeping in the bosom of this mystical land. That in itself is an exotic, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

### *Heavenly Lake Numco*

July 16. The road from Damxung to Lake Namco was pockmarked with jagged pebbles. The jeep threatened to fall to pieces at any moment as it was shaken from left to right. We all became violently car sick. When we finally drove out of the last mountain pass, we were greeted by an emerald expanse of water – Lake Namco, the world's highest lake, aptly known in Tibetan as "Heavenly Lake". It is so

**1. Children of the Tibetan ethnic group (by Yang Yankang)**
**2. A rock slide could happen at any moment and spell disaster for us. (by Chen Xinxiao)**
**3. The Hengduan Mountains and the Lancang River (by Zhang Mingji)**

1

beautiful that, without seeing it for oneself, it is impossible to believe that a lake could look so blue, so limpid and so inviting. The suggestive shapes of rocks on the shore were set off by the Nyainqentanglha Mountain, looming high in the background. Up above, fluffy white clouds hurriedly scudded across the pure blue sky. The scene was so perfect it was evocative of a dream.

The sight of the mist-enveloped hot springs at Yangbajain ignited our desire to take a good bath. It was difficult to find a place where the hot water was cool enough to bathe, we had to look for a section where the hot springs merged with cold water making it an acceptable temperature. Eventually we found one and plunged naked into the pit. We washed thoroughly and then washed all our dirty clothes and hung them out to dry on the brambles growing around the hot springs. We sunbathed for more than two hours dismissing all rumours about the harmful ultraviolet rays at this altitude. Once our laundry had dried we resumed our journey to arrive that night in Lhasa, capital of Tibet Autonomous Region.

## *Xigazê*

July 18. Our spirits were resurrected by our arrival at Xigazê, capital of rear Tibet, which literally means "plantation with the best soil". Lush patches of *qingke* barley and rape draped the mountain slopes. In the dusk the resplendent Tashilhumpo Monastery towered over the city. The squarish, rammed-earth abodes of the old city district were strikingly set off by the buildings in the new district some distance away. In the streets, horse-drawn carts threaded their way through throngs of pilgrims, who spun their prayer wheels while cumambulating the monastery.

The traffic police caught us for violating the local traffic regulations, but gave us a friendly smile when he realised from our vehicle licence plate that we were from Guangdong.

In the morning, Ah Li drove the jeep to the local garage for a quick service while the rest of us decided to climb the hill behind the Tashilhumpo Monastery where we wanted to take some shots of Xigazê. Although the hill was only 200 metres high we found the climb torturous because we were laden with all our photographic gear. We gazed enviously at the local pilgrims walking so effortlessly and leisurely along the road which skirted the monastery.

## *A No-Man's Land*

July 19. Following an ambiguous road sign, we ended up lost in the county seat of Tingri. We asked a local resident for directions but his advice only served to confuse us rather than clarify our sense of direction. At our wit's end, we consulted our map and compass again and decided to go west along the provincial highway which, as the map indicated, connected with the Sino-Nepalese Highway. Shortly afterwards we learned we had made the wrong decision, for we soon found ourselves in a no-man's land. The road was presentable enough to begin with but 30 kilometres into the journey the road tapered off, and there was not a single soul to ask for directions. We had no alternative but to follow the ruts in the road, probably made by horse-drawn carts, hoping they would lead us somewhere. Seven hours later, having covered only 50 kilometres, we were completely lost.

We decided to stop by a river to prepare lunch when a group of mounted Tibetans arrived. Thankfully, one of them was a teacher and

**1. The mani stones built by the local Tibetans to pray for protection from the Buddha (by Zhang Xiaoquan)**
**2. The fantastic Yangbajain hot springs (by Wang Miao)**

2

The jeep was stranded in the river and our films were floating in water

knew how to speak Chinese so he was able to tell us exactly where we were. Following his directions, we drove through a pebbly field and across a mountain pass, and eventually heaved a sigh of relief when we saw vehicles shuttling to and fro along the Sino-Nepalese Highway in the distance.

We drove down the mountain. To our dismay, the road ahead was washed out by a raging river and the wooden bridges crossing the river were only wide enough for horse-drawn carts. In desperation, four of us got off the jeep to look for a way to cross the river. Eventually, we found a road which we thought could lead us safely across to the other side. Our jeep entered the water, but just before we reached the other side the engine died. The jeep was stranded, its rear end submerged in the river. A shudder ran down my spine. "Come on! Let's push the jeep," I ordered in my capacity as team leader. "Can't you see we were panting like hell already," Wenbiao protested. "How do we have the strength to push the jeep?" "All our finished films are in the rear trunk!" I shouted back and began taking off my clothes.

The statement had an electrifying effect on the others. In mere seconds everyone was in the water straining to push the jeep for all our worth, while Ah Li sat behind the wheel trying to restart the engine. Despite all our efforts the vehicle mocked us and rolled backwards for a metre and stopped right in the middle of the river! When we finally managed to coax the jeep onto solid ground, I was so exhausted that I thought I could see stars. Prying open the trunk, I was almost overcome with despair – all our films were floating in water!

## The Himalaya

July 20. We woke up to find the sun shining brightly. By the time we had found the road to Mount Qomolangma, we were dismayed to find out we had wasted a whole day making a detour of nearly 200 kilometres.

We paid a toll of 700 yuan at an inspection station and proceeded directly towards Mount Qomolangma. We had barely driven over a rough river bank when the battery casing cracked. We fastened it into place as best we could with a length of hemp rope, and headed towards a mountain pass 4,900 metres above sea level. Before us, the jumble of snow-covered Himalayan peaks soared to an awesome height, forming a majestic skyline. Fog hung like a mantle over the valleys to the extent that the peaks appeared to hang suspended in the clouds. As we nosed our way to the bottom of the valley, we felt as if we were in a world as yet unvisited by any other civilization. Despite their magnificent form, the mountains lay stark naked; their sheer height and sub freezing temperatures, coupled with the lack of soil, all but barred the survival of living things. The existence of life in this bleak world was scarcely evidenced by the presence of a few patches of qingke barley and a few abodes tucked amidst a tiny grove of poplar trees.

We glanced at three foreigners marching towards the mountains. Carrying their rucksacks on their back, they strode confidently and light-heartedly to their destination.

At last we reached the Rongbo Monastery, nestled in the centre of a small village of a dozen or so mud houses. The terrace in front of the village provided an excellent view of the immense Mount Qomolangma and the glistening forms of the famed Rongbo Glaciers. We immediately jumped out of the jeep and began searching for the best camera angle from which to capture the magnificent Qomolangma.

Nearly one hour later, we discovered what looked like a mountain highway. Nearly two kilometres later, a vertical rock cliff blocked our way. We were impatient to climb the mountain and so we immediately set about discarding everything that was superfluous. Even with only the essentials, my load still weighed several dozen kilos: the oxygen cylinder, cardiac drugs, a water canister, a statue of the Goddess of Mercy and a packet of sacrificial objects, plus the camera tripod were all necessary items.

Our ascent started at an altitude of 5,280 metres above sea level. By the time we reached a stretch of level road which led to the foot of the rocky mountain, our breath was already laboured. Even more worrying was the condition of the slope which was strewn with loose stones. If one of us disturbed a loose rock, it could hit a team member behind, so we had to proceed up the mountain four abreast.

Thus began the most arduous mountaineering experience of my life. My legs felt as heavy as lead and I gasped for breath with every step forward. Several times I thought about using my oxygen cylinder, but I thought better of it – the life-saving oxygen had to be reserved for when I really needed it. I climbed on, stopping every two or three paces to catch my breath. Soon my head became dizzy, I felt as if my

**1. The mountaineering base camp at the foot of the Qomolangma (by Wang Miao)**
**2. Awaiting rescue at the foot of the Qomolangma (by Chen Xinxiao)**

life was drawing to an end. Eventually I opened my oxygen cylinder and inhaled two large gulps of air, but it failed to produce the desired effect. It was the sight of some graves of others who had fallen on they way to the world's tallest mountain that gave me the strength and motivation to reach the nearest slope in a single stretch. Looking over my shoulder I cheered my companions on. "Take your time," I said. "The Qomolangma is still hidden behind clouds." I told them to return to the starting point if their hearts started to beat too fast. Under these circumstances everyone needed to be their own saviour.

### Oh, the Qomolangma

There was a brooding silence about the wilderness. Mount Qomolangma, the world's No. 1 peak, stands at a height of 8,848 metres above sea level – the Tibetans call it "Peak of the Goddess", believing that it is the incarnation of the Goddess who used her divine power and saved the multitude from the menace of demons. Today, having endured all the hardships of a long journey and arrived at its foot, we were dismayed to see the peak veiled behind a thick pall of clouds. Was it because we had not shown enough sincerity?

Standing at the top of the pebble-infested slope we felt the blue sky was so close at hand that the clouds were ready for our picking. The glaciers shone so brightly that they dazzled our eyes. In the distance we could make out the variegated shapes of a huge forest of icicles. And we felt we could hear the heart beat of the Goddess. I felt overwhelmed. Mount Qomolangma, I said silently, let me salute you. And I began singing, "Oh, the majestic Himalayan Mountains! Oh, the roaring Yarlung Zangpo River! In the bosom of high mountains and long rivers, we can feel your deep feelings...." Although the lyrics came out in a faltering way, I sang it with uttermost sincerity. Never had I vocalised a song so loudly and with such vigour.

### The Ritual Ceremony

The clouds finally dispersed, and the four of us immediately raised our cameras and clicked away. Although atheists we decided to hold an improvised sacrificial ceremony in honour of Mt. Qomolangma and in celebration of our mountaineering feat. On the surface of a boulder we laid out the sacrificial objects we had brought along. Solemnly we placed the statue of the Goddess of Mercy in the centre and baptised it with the water we had fetched from a river at the foot of the Qomolangma. (When we returned home we were to contribute this

statue to the Nanhai Cultural Garden of the Goddess of Mercy as a memento for our pilgrimage to the West Region.) In the absence of any incense sticks we lit several cigarettes, and placed several chocolates in front of the statue and then burned some back issues of *Nanhai News*. As we did this we wondered if the divine goddess was laughing at our amateurishness.

The Qomolangma did not laugh. Standing like a demure lady, she gazed down at us with a gentle smile. We reloaded our cameras with one roll of film after another until after 9 p.m. when the last ray of sunshine gradually disappeared.

Ah Li, who had chosen to stay behind with the jeep, had climbed over a nearby hill to marvel at the sight. He was somewhat puzzled by our euphoria. Perhaps, I surmised, crazy self-absorption is the hallmark of every avid photography buff.

Our intent was to return to the monastery for the night – but it was not to be. There is a saying: "When joy reaches its height, it is sorrow's turn". The jeep refused to start! Under the light of two army torches the five of us fussed about with engine until midnight, but our efforts failed. We had no choice but to pitch our tent for the night.

## Being Stranded and in Danger

July 21. Wenbiao and Ah Li rose early the next morning and resumed the task of trying to resurrect the jeep. Xinxiao, not wanting to waste any opportunity, went out with his camera to take some more shots. Cilian retrieved his hat which the high wind had blown away the previous day, and searched for conch fossils. I decided to visit the

**1. Characteristic Tibetan abodes in Dingri (by Wang Miao)**
**2. Grassland and sand dunes in Dingri (by Chen Xinxiao)**

We could be swept away in a snow storm or swallowed up by an avalanche.

graveyard of 32 fallen mountaineers. The graves were laid out around a mammoth boulder by the edge of a frozen river planted there by runoffs from the Rongbo Glaciers. The piles of stones which constituted each of the graves had Tibetan inscriptions written on pieces of black slate in front of each of them. Unfortunately, the wording had faded and become illegible. I laid out several banknotes and burned some newspapers as a token of my respect.

We had an early lunch at 11 a.m. and then pushed the jeep for all our worth down the rugged field in an attempt to get it started. It was useless, everyone collapsed to the ground, gasping for air. We even tried to crank the engine by hand, but that also failed. It was only then that we realise the seriousness of our situation. We were stranded at the mouth of a glacier. We could be swept away in a snow storm or swallowed up by an avalanche. If a snowstorm or blizzard set in, we could perish. These thoughts sent a shudder down my spine. The capricious weather of Tibet was notorious.

It was at that point we realised we should never have ventured beyond the safety of the camp site. After all, we were not professionals. I decided that Ah Li and I should rush to the Rongbo Monastery for help. I told the rest of the group where the medicines were kept and told them to stay put. Picking up some supplies of water, instant noodles and an oxygen cylinder, we hurriedly set off for the monastery. Time was of the essence.

### *Walking the Difficult 10 Kilometres*

Rongbo Monastery was only 10 kilometres away which is an easy distance to cover under normal conditions, but not 5,300 metres above sea level – we battled with the thin air making each step a mammoth effort and had to stop for a breather every 10 minutes. We were also obliged to jump across dozens of frozen streams. Luckily, I was wearing a pair of water-proof mountaineering boots and managed to pick my way across places where there was shallow water or stepping stones; unfortunately Ah Li's shoes were not, and so he had to wade across barefooted holding his shoes in the air to keep them out of the icy waters.

Our journey back seemed to take an eternity. Ah Li was exhausted. He sat down by a boulder, unable to take another step. At this juncture a strapping young foreigner passed us wearing a knee-length coat over a pair of shorts, with an oversized heavy rucksack on his back. He walked down the slope seemingly with the greatest of ease wearing the smile of a conqueror. From the way he gesticulated I guessed he was German. His confident spirit had a galvanising effect on me and pumped new life through my body. Suddenly, my energy burst forth. I told Ah Li to take his time and follow on as soon as he regained his strength. I made it to the monastery without stopping again.

When I got there the monastery was deserted, save for a few yaks grazing on the sparse grass. I sat on a stone at the entrance to the village, convinced that on this Sunday of all Sundays surely a vehicle must come our way. I was hungry, tired and sleepy. I knew Xinxiao, Cilian and Wenbiao were waiting anxiously for my return, but did not know at the time that they were suffering from dizzy spells and racking coughs and that a mass of black clouds were descending upon them, nor that a flock of birds of prey had sent them scrambling into the jeep. As for Ah Li, three hours had passed, and there was still no sign of him. Was he still OK?

Just then, I heard the jingling of bells and presently four foreigners arrived with a camel caravan. Just as I was contemplating hiring the caravan to rescue my companions, the tooting of an horn jerked me back to reality. Three jeeps and a East-Wind truck pulled up beside me. Just at the same moment, Ah Li arrived.

The motorcade were escorting a mountaineering team from Italy. The man in charge was an official of the Tibetan Mountaineering Association. "When did you arrive at Qomolangma?" he asked, without so much as casting me a glance. I replied that we had just arrived. "You are fortunate," he said. "Had you arrived last night, I'm afraid your jeep would not have survived." "Why? Does anybody here steal cars?" I asked. "Who would come here to steal cars? It is the windstorms you need to worry about. The other day, the wind made away with an East-Wind truck."

The information caught me speechless. In spite of myself I turned and looked at the peaks beyond the Qomolangma bathed in bright sunshine. It seemed like such a tranquil, peaceful world. But judging from the man's tone, he was not kidding.

"You've got to wait for a while," the official continued. "Then I'll send these two gentlemen to help you repair your jeep. It is, after all, a minor mishap. Fancy acting so rashly – how could you go farther than

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the camp site!" I smiled sheepishly, for it was my ignorance of the conditions that had landed my companions in this dangerous situation. Inwardly, however, I was happy they would soon be brought to safety.

Ah Li and I arrived at the camp site standing on the running board on either side of the East-Wind truck. I had never ridden a vehicle this way and, even worse, we had to dodge the pebbles thrown up by the wheels.

While Ah Li continued on foot from the camp site to inform my companions, I helped the mountaineering team unload their equipment which was impressive indeed. The gear ranged from top quality ropes and pickaxes to power generators and even a satellite transmitter. There were even bottles of wine. The two drivers, sensing my impatience took me over to their Toyota jeep and we headed off to find my companions.

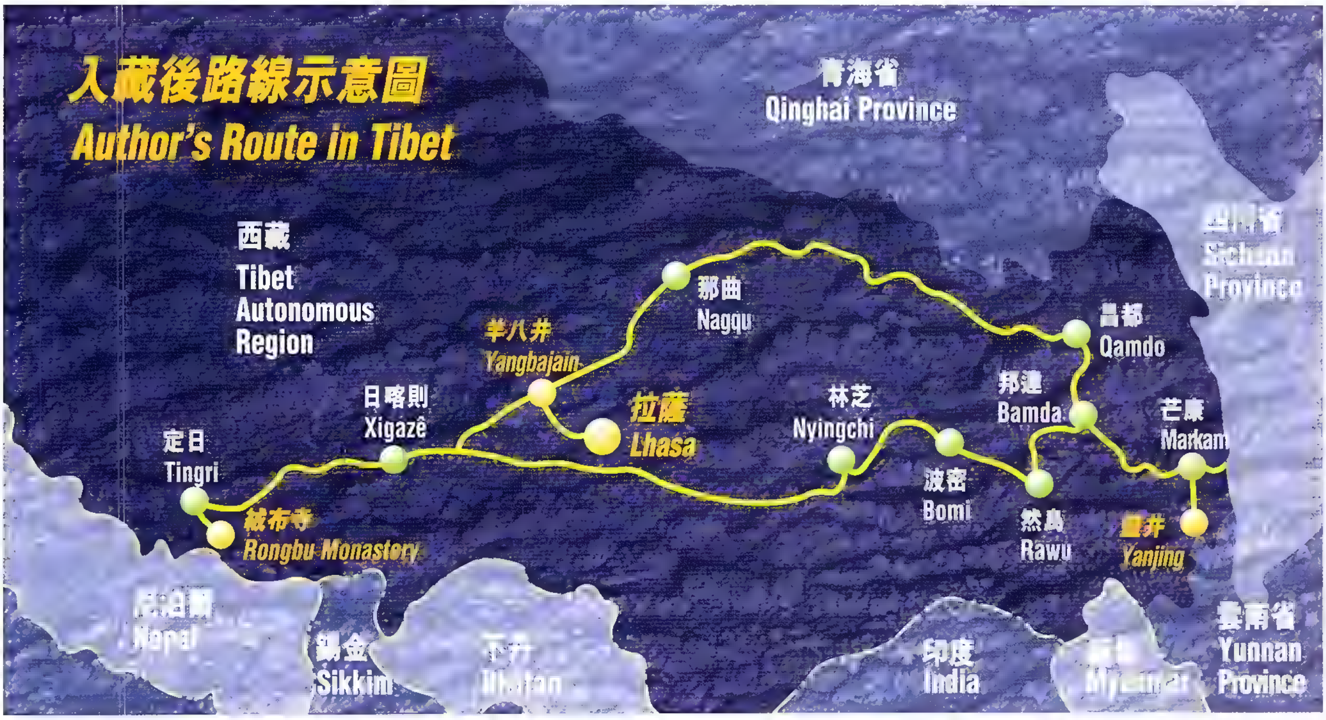
Later, I was to learn that Xinxiao, Cilian and Wenbiao had been utterly disappointed when they caught sight of an exhausted Ah Li returning with nothing but a pair of shoes in his hand. Quite understandably they cheered and rolled around on the ground when they saw the Toyota sped across the frozen rivers, past Ah Li, and pull up beside them.

Within 10 minutes our rescuers had fixed the jeep. With gratitude we took a few photos with them and shook their hands for a long time before we finally said good-bye.

A few pigeons flew overhead and pecked at the noodle crumbs left on the ground and then landed on the luggage rack as if to bid us farewell. A large rat emerged from a hole between the rocks and fixed its eyes upon us. We collected up our rubbish and placed it in a plastic bag and took it with us, unwilling to contaminate the pristine purity of this mighty mountain.

July 21. At 4:15 p.m., we left Mount Qomolangma and began our return journey home. On the mountain road some 20 kilometres beyond the Rongbo Monastery, we saw a dozen or so foreigners

**1. Rabbits energetically running up and down the highlands while we feel the debilitating effects of the high-altitude (by Zhang Xiaoquan)**
**2. Trucks passing to and from Gongbujianda (by He Cilian)**


入藏後路線示意圖
Author's Route in Tibet
青海省
Qinghai Province
西藏
Tibet
Autonomous
Region
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昌都
Qamdo
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Lhasa
林芝
Nyingchi
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Markam
定日
Tingri
波密
Bomi
絨布寺
Rongbu Monastery
然烏
Rawu
鹽井
Yanjing
尼泊爾
Nepal
錫金
Sikkim
不丹
Bhutan
印度
India
緬甸
Myanmar
雲南省
Yunnan
Province

trudging towards Mount Qomolangma, escorted by a yak caravan loaded with luggage and supplies. For a time I wondered if the world's number one peak was reserved solely for foreigners. Why didn't I see a single compatriot coming to seek inspiration from this land of snow?

My reverie was interrupted by the arrival of a jeep. Three young women shouted towards us: "How are you, mountaineering boys? We are your mountaineering sisters." I found their voices and looks most endearing as they smiled at us disarmingly. They told us they had rented the jeep and driven it all the way from Chengdu, Sichuan Province. I was swelled with pride for my people.

"Good Luck!" I shouted after them.

### *Travellers' Tips*

The best months to travel to Tibet are the months from June to September. Jeeps can be hired in Chengdu or Lhasa and prices vary from 300 to 1,000 yuan per day depending on their condition. An experienced and healthy driver, and a complete set of tools for the jeep are essential.

Also essential are a weatherproof tent, down sleeping bag, warm clothing, high pressure cooker, medicines, sufficient food, water and oxygen.

Travel routes in Tibet are rough and sometimes even dangerous, so one should plan the itinerary well and be prepared for delays and all kinds of crisis. The journey calls for endurance and excellent health.

It is also possible to travel by scheduled bus. However, in some places, it is available only once every several days, and it is impossible to stop the bus for the traveller to take photographs.

The extreme weather conditions of Tibet can affect the performance of one's camera. A mechanical camera is highly recommended. Also, to avoid damage to your camera, you'd better carry it in hand or secure it somewhere close to your body while driving along the bumping roads.

*Translated by Ling Yuan*

**1. The solemn and gallant Qomolangma (by Zhang Xiaoquan)**

1

# The Picturesque Painters' Village

Photo & Article by Shan Xiaogang

When I arrived at the Painters' Village in Dandong, Liaoning Province, it was already evening. I could just about make out the pointed rooftops and round windows of the houses on the hill. Their outline reminded me of a Medieval European castle.

Like the captivating beauty of a stunning oil painting, the soft window lights bathed the surface of the nearby Qingshan Lake and a bright moon accentuated the whole composition. The only sound to disturb the silence was the tireless twittering of birds from the valleys in the distance.

The next morning I climbed to the top of the highest building and was greeted by a view dominated by a tapestry of colourful autumn leaves emerging through the morning mist. On the lake, I could see several boats gliding gently through the mist hovering just above the surface. The fishermen were expertly casting their nets while the village girls on the bank hauled in the catch. I could hear the oars dip into the water as they moved along like a melodious tune drifting towards me....

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I walked down to the edge of the lake and looked back at the "castle" to see five huge Chinese characters etched into the front wall – which read "Chinese Painters' Village". I later learned that the villa was built with funds raised by Mr. Song Yugua, a well-known artist of traditional landscape painting, thus it was also called Yugua Mountain Villa. Over the years the villa has seen an increase in the number of its guests who are quite often well-known painters and tourists. They seem to enjoy the natural, peaceful surroundings and to be attracted by its ancient, castle-like accommodation and unique scenery.

At the quayside, I boarded a leisure boat, an imitation of the ancient south China boats which once sailed the rivers. The tour took me to the centre of Qingshan Lake formed by the Hunjiang River, the largest tributary of the Yalu River. It is said that UNESCO once conducted a satellite survey and discovered that the lake is one of six unpolluted areas in the world. This is easy to believe, the water is such a deep, clear blue. My eyes busily took in the graceful scenery. The hills on the banks of the lake were ablaze with fiery red autumn leaves, and as we moved on, various scenic spots were pointed out to me: Lilac Cliffs, the Flower Fairy Terrace, the White Cloud Peak and patches of the brocade-like gardens hidden among the forest.

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Previous pages:

Main photo: Students often visit this spot to practise drawing autumn scenery.

1. Among the lobby's unusual decorations is this portrait of Empress Cixi.
2. The artist's studio in the "Painters' Village"
3. The furnishings reflect the feel of the mountains.

This page:

1. Ripe, red fruits can be bought at the dock outside the Painters' Village.
2. A painter staying in the Painters' Village.
3. Painters' Village in the architectural style of a castle in Europe.
4. Autumn leaves are a big tourist attraction.

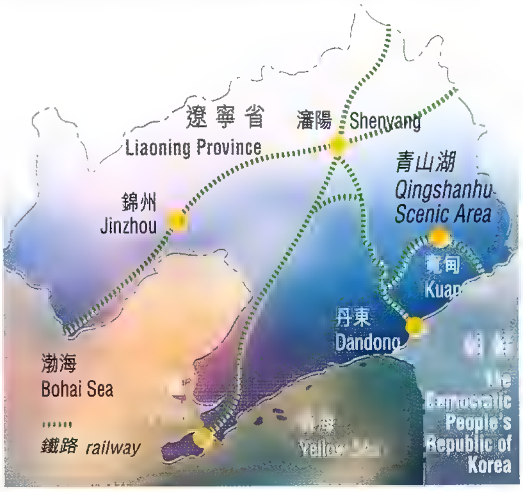
The boat made a left turn soon after we went through the Grand Valley to arrive at the Immortal Valley, where the second section of Painters' Village is found. Here rows of European-style villas are embraced by broken cliffs, graceful peaks, thick bushes and gurgling creeks.

Stepping onto the make-shift dock, I was aware of a delicious aroma and immediately went to investigate. I found some mountain dwellers roasting wildfowl, tomatoes, fish and lake shrimps. Some girls sold walnuts, chestnuts, dried apple slices and deep-fried silkworm chrysalises. I stepped inside one of the villas and found the living room, artist's studio and bedrooms uniquely furnished with sections of thick tree trunks fashioned into chairs, and slabs of stone for tabletops. The dadoes, staircases and flooring are made from red pine. Each of the bedrooms had windows on all four sides opening onto a valley scene. It is easy to see why painters like to come here – from any window one can randomly select a scene for one's creation.

*Translated by F. Huang*

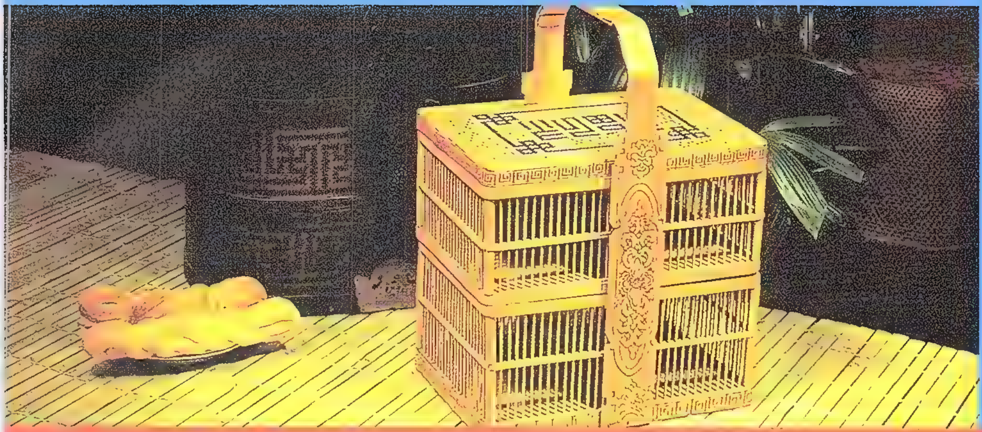
Qingshan Lake in autumn when the leaves turn fiery red. The scenery, plus the unpolluted waters, provide a paradise for holidaymakers.

### 青山湖位置示意圖
### Location Map of Qingshanhu Scenic Area



## Travellers' Tips

**When to go:** Any season, summer and autumn being the best. **Transportation:** Take the train from Shenyang to the county seat of Kuandian, change to bus and arrive at Qingshan Lake on the same day. **Accommodation:** Standard room, 256 yuan per night. **Food:** Western and Chinese restaurants, local specialities also available. Prices are reasonable. **Telephone contacts:** Qingshan Lake, Kuandian, Liaoning: 0415-5859008. Jianguo Hotel, Shenyang: 024-2859094.



ZHEJIANG

# ARTS & CRAFTS

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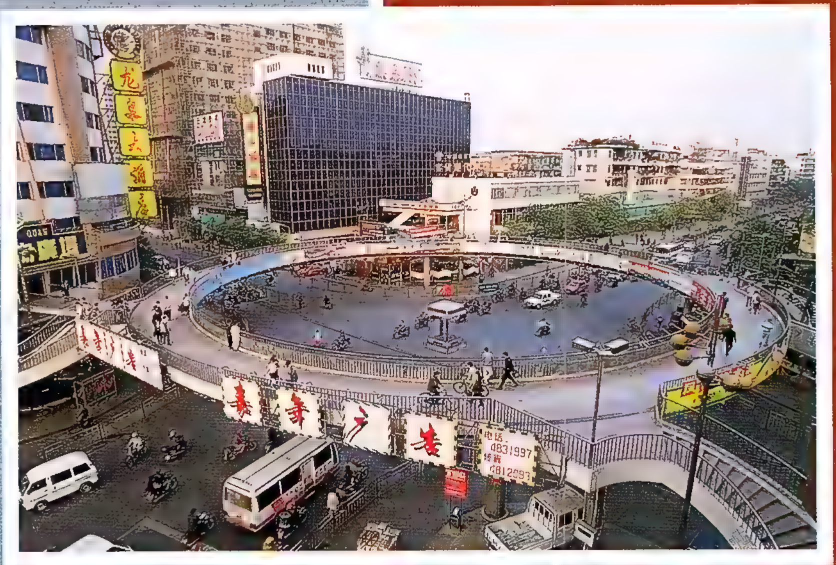
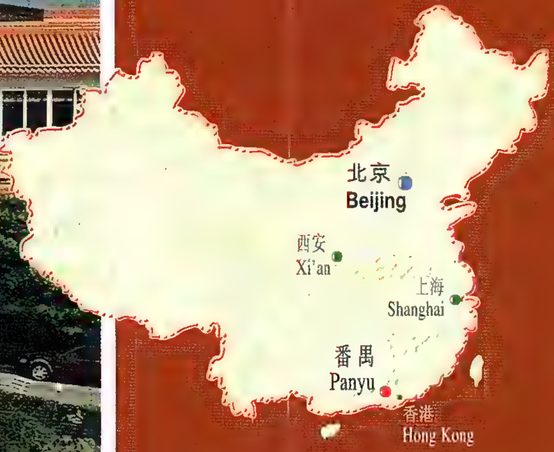
# PANYU — AN ANCIENT CITY

Sailing into the busy estuary of the Pearl River admist a flurry of ships and boats plying the waters, one is overwhelmed by the sound of boat whistles mingled with the noise of construction works on the shore of Nansha, the southern coastal township of Panyu City in Guangdong Province. Nansha is at an important stage of the county's economic development, and so it is currently being expanded to become a hub of the transport network system in the Pearl River Delta, as well as an international port, a commercial centre and a tourist destination. More than HK$1 billion has been pumped into Nansha's development projects and the town is





# STRIVING FOR MODERNISATION

forecast to become a high-tech model city at the beginning of the 21st Century. Benefiting from a tax-free foreign trade area, it is also destined to be an administrative, cultural and financial centre. Sailing further up the estuary, you will find yourself facing the imposing Humen Bridge, currently under construction, which will link the east and west coasts of the Pearl River and facilitate the traffic flow between Hong Kong and Shenzhen to the east, and the satellite cities of Guangzhou to the west. The heat wave of economic development can be sensed in the air in the suburbs of Panyu.

Situated directly south of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province and at the centre of the Pearl River Delta (Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau being the vertices), Panyu is an industrial satellite city under the jurisdiction of Guangzhou. The city covers an area of 1,313 square kilometres with a population of 800,000. Its geographical position makes it the hub of a well-developed transport network that connects all the major cities and townships in the region – it only takes an hour to get from Panyu to Guangzhou via the Luoxi Bridge. Agriculture is its economic mainstay upon which secondary and tertiary industries are built. In 1992 and 1993, Panyu was rated as one of the cities (counties) that have the best economic strength and future potential. It is also one of the 10 cities (counties) that have the highest GDP in China. A fertile land criss-crossed with rivers and streams, Panyu is dubbed China's warehouse of cereals and sugar. In addition, bananas, rice and sea produce are turned out in abundance. Since the economic reform introduced in the early 80s, light industries and processing industries have been developing steadily on the foundation of its healthy agricultural economy. Recent years have seen steady increase in people's income. In fact, the emergence of new apartment blocks alongside the old traditional houses give a strong hint that the locals' wealth has increased.

Panyu is also a place from which a large number of Chinese people emigrated overseas in the past two centuries and it is estimated that about 200,000 Panyu natives are now living in Hong Kong, Macau and foreign countries. These compatriots and overseas Chinese continue to make great financial contributions to the development of their hometown. Their investments have helped in the construction of roads and bridges and in improvements to education and health care facilities, and have been a strong, vitalising injection to raise the quality of life in Panyu.

## Shifting from Agriculture to Industry

Today, the township's industrial development covers the production of sugar, textiles, electrical machinery, building materials, electronics and food processing – together, they form the backbone of Panyu's economy. Rural areas which used to depend on agrarian mode of production have also long caught the wind of economic reform. Back in 1984, the villages still lead a quiet rustic life. Cows and pigs could be seen roaming about on tracts of sand and mud. In the late 80s, things started to change as considerable numbers of villagers began to abandon their plough and scythe and grab soldering-iron and spanner. By the early 1990s, quite a number of foreign-funded enterprises were set up here and they hired the villagers to work on their production and assembly lines. Some farmers have also started their own small businesses, setting up stalls or small workshops – the most notable example are the bike

**Previous page: Nansha Port facing the Humen Bridge and bustling Panyu City (Inset)**

1. **Rows of luxury apartments in the suburbs**
2. **A harvest in the sugar cane field**
3. **Having a studio photograph taken has become a trend among young people**
4. **Luoxi Bridge linking Panyu with Guangzhou**

repair stalls lining the main roads in the villages. The growing number of motorcycles on the roads has boosted the trade of the tiller-cum-bike mechanics.

The heart beat of the city can be felt at the entrance of the city as waves of taxis, buses and motorbikes honk their horns at the busy intersections. Adorning the pedestrian crossings and streets are colourfully designed advertisements and commercial posters. In the main streets, sign boards compete for attention outside shops selling a wide variety of goods, durable or luxury.

Panyu is developing its manufacturing and service industries at about the same time and pace thanks to its rich cultural heritage and the endowment of beautiful scenery. Holiday resorts and low density residential areas are constructed and planned around or near scenic spots, and its travel and hotel industries have been as important to Panyu's development as its agriculture and manufacturing.

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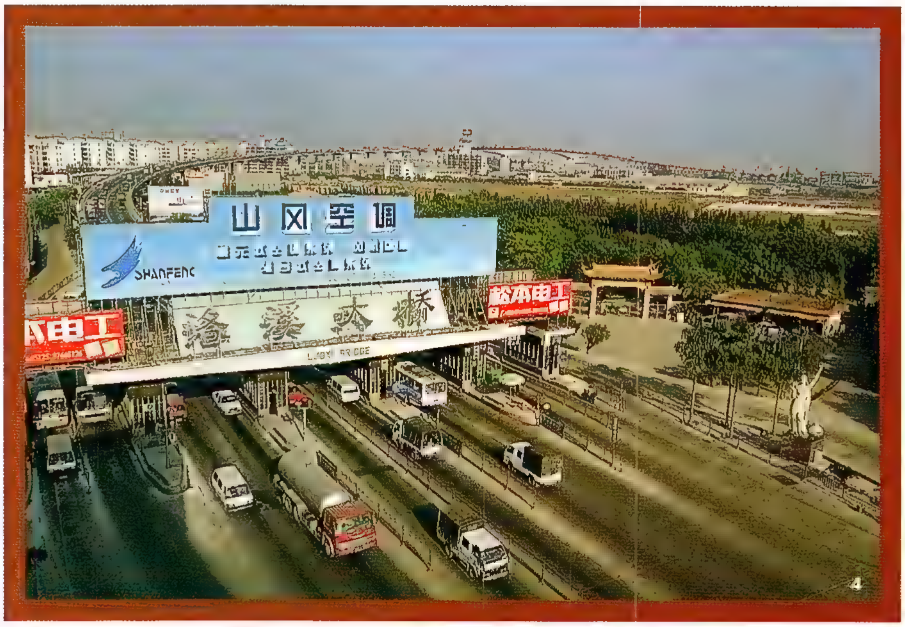
## Rich Cultural Heritage

Though pragmatic in their outlook and firmly set on greater economic achievement, the people of Panyu value their rich cultural heritage and make many efforts to preserve it. Touring the scenic and historical spots in Panyu County, one easily becomes engrossed with the perfect blend of nature and ancient Chinese culture. The ancients' literary ebullience inspired by nature is reflected by the couplets, poems and calligraphy inscribed on stones and rocks or carved on the columns of classic architectures. These are the legacy of a long tradition whereby intellectuals and scholars, carefree or burdened with state affairs, left their mark at the site where they went to capture their mood or state of mind. Classic Chinese mansions and gardens such as Yuyin (Shade Remaining) Mansion set against magnificent scenery easily arouses one's longing to return to the ancient times when classic Chinese culture was in its heyday. Drinking in the beauty of ancient China while listening to the soothing music played out by *guzheng*, a traditional Chinese stringed instrument, one can easily become transported to the "good old days".

A county with more than 2,000 years of history, Panyu has given birth to quite a number of prominent figures. To name a few, they are: the masters of the Lingnan School of painting (Ju Chao, Gao Qifeng, Gao Jianfu and Chen Shuren); the three masters of Guangdong music who all bear the surname He; the famed composer Xian Xinghai whose masterpieces express perfectly the essence of the Chinese people's folk culture and their iron will to resist the Japanese invasion during World War II; Deng Shichang, the admiral who died a national hero in the sea battle against the invading Japanese navy in the late Qing Dynasty; and Qu Dajun, a famous man of letters of the late Qing Dynasty and an expert in customs and folklore.

Established as a county in 214 B.C. during the reign of Emperor Qin Shihuang, Panyu is one of the oldest towns in Guangdong Province and the administrative centre of Guangzhou City. Today's Guangzhou City was derived from ancient Panyu. A thousand years ago, traders who came to Southern China from as far as the Middle East via the Silk Road on the Sea recognised Guangzhou by the name of Panyu. During the Opium War of 1840, the strongly fortified Humen at the entrance to Guangzhou was the site where the fierce war took place. The fortresses and battlements still remain today. The county seat was moved from Guangzhou to Xinzao in 1933 and then from Xinzao to Shiqiao in 1945. In the early 1990s, Panyu started playing an increasingly important role in the modernisation of southern China and so its administrative status has been upgraded to that of a city. The city's rapid economic development, coupled with the emergence of its southern township Nansha as a promising economic boomer, has helped enhance the prosperity of Guangzhou.



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# TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

### Ancient Town of Shawan

Lying 7 kilometres south of Shiqiao, an ancient village called Shawan where many old buildings still stand. The most outstanding is Liugeng (Everlasting Cultivation) Hall which embodies the splendid style of classic Chinese architecture and interior design. Other ancient buildings are residences typical of those found in the Pearl River Delta area. The festival parade celebrated on the third day of the third lunar month is a colourful event in which youngsters and children dress up as historical figures or folklore characters and are carried along on ornately decorated carts.

### The Yuyin (Shade Remaining) Mansion

The Yuyin (Shade Remaining) Mansion is located in Nancun, not far from Shiqiao. Completed in 1871, the garden of the mountain villa is one of four famous Chinese gardens in Guangdong Province. Although the villa covers no more than 2,000 square metres, it is a complete microcosm of a typical Chinese garden — pavilions, terraces, waterside buildings, corridors, arched bridges, flower beds and lotus ponds are meticulously laid out separated by bamboo plants, trees, shrubs and rockeries. Complementing all these are groups of calligraphy, paintings and poems carved on tablets and wooden ornamental screens.

### Lianhua (Lotus Flower) Mountain

Situated on the estuary of the Pearl River, Lotus Mountain features magnificent scenery with sheer cliffs, massive rock forms and unusual caves shaped by several centuries of weathering and quarrying. On its peak is the 50-metre tall Lotus Flower Pagoda containing 72 bells. The Lotus Flower Fort is a must for visitors interested in war history — battlements and canons still remain. During the Opium War, the fort was under the command of the famous Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu who banned the import of opium.

### Flying Dragon World Amusement Park

A theme park dedicated to snakes where you can not only enjoy exciting snake show but also taste some of the delicious dishes made with snake. The park is situated in the town of Dashi 10 kilometres from Guangzhou.

### Flying Picture and Dreaming Shadow City

Occupying a vast piece of land in Nancun Town, this amusement park offers a variety of modern entertainment activities which include car racing, horse riding, boating, etc. Artists from Guangdong and Hong Kong often come here to give live performances.

### Nansha Golf Course

Built on the slopes of Huangshanlu, the 36-hole Nansha Golf Course is one of the largest and best equipped golf courses in China.

### Gusu Garden

At the south-east corner of Nansha lies a waterside street named Gusu Garden. Walking along the street arouses a feeling that one is strolling in the charming city of Suzhou which is a canal city in Jiangsu and has Gusu as its other name. In this street, one can sip tea in an old-style teahouse or read under the shelter of elegant pavilions as the ancient scholars once did. Canals, bridges, towers, corridors and pavilions of Suzhou are faithfully reconstructed here.

### Tianhou (Goddess of the Sea) Palace

The new Tianhou Palace built at the foot of the Dajiao Hill in Nansha is one of the most magnificent of its kind in the world. Right in front of the main buildings stand a 14.5-metre tall, elegant statute of the Goddess of the Sea, the protectress of seafarers. The temple compound consists of an archway, bell and drum towers, pavilions and halls. The Main Hall houses the statues of the goddess and her eight assistant officials and generals as well as the inscriptions in praise of the goddess by three emperors of the Qing Dynasty. Standing in the rear area of the hill is the 45-metre high Nanling Pagoda at the top of which one can have a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape.

### Baomo (Treasure Ink) Garden

Treasure Ink Garden is the first village park in Shawan built in the late Qing Dynasty. The garden has recently undergone renovation and been designed in the Lingnan architectural style. Exquisite pavilions, ponds and rare plants form an ideal rest-place. Situated next to the park's east is Lord Bao's Temple which houses a couplet and a portrait of Lord Bao dedicated to Bao Zheng, a minister reputed and respected for being an impartial and honest official of the Northern Song Dynasty.

## For Your Reference

### Climate

Panyu enjoys a subtropical climate with an average daily temperature of 22.4°C.

### Accommodation

**Clifford (Nansha) Hotel** Add: Jingang Road, Nansha • Tel: (020) 8468 2168 • Fax: (020) 8468 2240

**Panyu Miramar Hotel ★★★** Add: No.8 Middle Qinghe Road, Shiqiao Town (0.5km from the city centre) • Tel: 02096-4826833 • Fax: 02096-4838355

### Transport

**Ferry:** Ferries run between Hong Kong and Nansha and Lianhua Mountain. A trip from Hong Kong to Nansha takes about one and a quarter hours while that to Lianhua Mountain slightly more than one and a half hours. The pier is located at China Hong Kong City.

**Bus:** It can also be easily reached by bus from Guangzhou. The trip takes 30-45 minutes.

### Travel Agencies

**Pearl River Delta International Travel Service Co., Ltd.** Add: Shop 321, Shun Tak Centre, 200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong • Tel: (852) 2857 5685 • Fax: (852) 2857 5695

*Photos by Chan Yat Nin*   *Article by Winston Yau*

1. Nansha Golf Course
2. Lijiang Pearl Hotel
3. Playing with a boa constrictor in the Flying Dragon World
4. An adventure on horse back in the Flying Picture and Dreaming Shadow City
5. The bowling alleys in Panyu Hotel

# THE YI ETHNIC GROUP

With a population of more than 6 million, the Yi people are one of China's largest ethnic minorities. Settled mostly in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou, the greatest concentration of them being found in the Greater and Lesser Liangshan Mountains lying on the border between Sichuan and Yunnan.

The Yi people emerged as a distinctive ethnic group after the ancient Qiang people went south and merged with the aboriginal tribes in the southwest. Their historical roots can be traced to Zhong Mouyou, the 31st generation ancestor of the Yis, who left his home in northwest Sichuan and settled down in the Luoni Mountain (today's Huize County, Yunnan Province) where he had six sons who later came to be known as the ancestors of six major yi branches.

In the 1950s, the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and several autonomous counties were established, and

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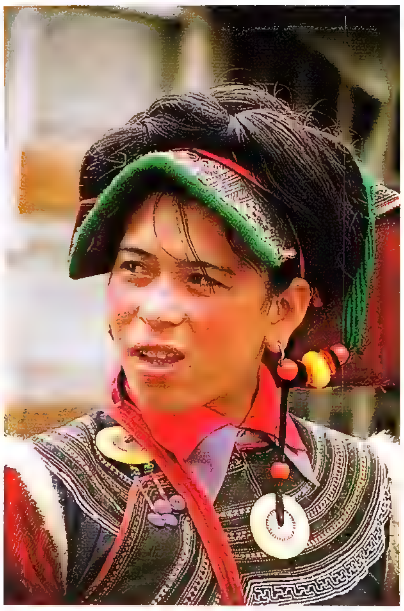
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this turned over a new leaf in the history of the Yi people. The slave system was abolished in 1956, and since then the yis have made dramatic progress in agricultural and industrial production. Many new enterprises, including hydroelectricity, fertilisers and agricultural machinery and mining have been set up, while the sectors of culture and education are continuously improving.

## Costumes

The costumes of the Yis are very distinctive particularly that of those living in the Liangshan Mountains because they not only reflect the different dialects, hometowns and sub-branches but also the wearer's age group, social position, marital and family status. For instance, male hair decorations, called the "heavenly bodhisattva" and hero knot, are worn to the left or to the right to show which of the two major sub-branches from Yunnan and Guizhou the man originate from. Regional differences are also indicated by the width of the bottom of the trouser legs.

Women wear a handkerchief on their head before they give birth and a hat afterwords. Layered skirts reveal the wealth of the owner. The skirt is also very symbolic of a girl's advancement towards womanhood. There are skirts for girls and others for grown-ups. A grown-up's skirt consists of three coloured layers, the lowest of which has many pleats – the more the pleats, and the wider the skirt border, the wealthier her family. The poncho is a daily necessity for all Yis for it not only shield them from rain and the cold, but also serves as a quilt. The poncho differs in colour and decoration from one region to another.

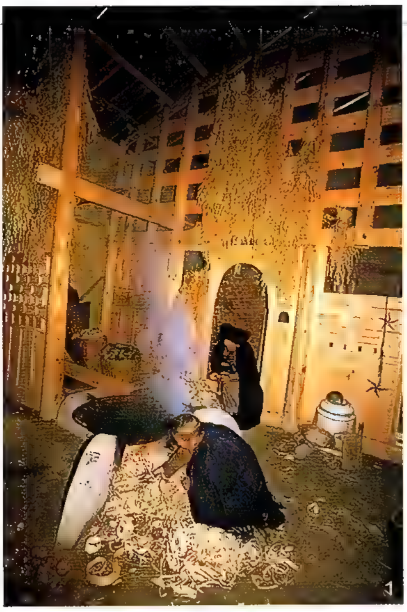
## Adobe

Most of the Yi live in flat-roofed houses made of sun-dried earth. They are usually built on a foundation of stone and on slopes facing the sun. Their roofs are first covered with straw and mud over which a layer of fine earth is added. The whole mixture is then pressed down very firmly. Surprisingly, this type of earth roof is completely waterproof.

## Diet

During the New Year and other festivals, all kinds of meat including pork, mutton, beef and chicken are stewed in a pot large enough to feed the whole family. Guests are often treated to big chunks of half-cooked meat fat, which the Yi people consider to be an honourable way to show their hospitality.

1. **A Yi family and their new house (by Wang Miao)**
2. **Liangshan man (by Wang Miao)**
3. **A boy in Yunnan (by Wang Miao)**
4. **Yi girl with beautiful ornament (by Wang Miao)**
5. **Father and son (by Zhong Dakun)**



1. **Residence of a Yi family in Xichang, Sichuan (by Chan Yat Nin)**
2. **Yi people in Dayao County watching a singing contest (by Wang Miao)**
3. **Young audience at the singing contest (by Wang Miao)**
4. **Passing through the chains is a skill unique to Yis of Zhaotong, Yunnan. (by Wang Miao)**
5. **A sheep pen in Zhaojue County, Liangshan (by Leng Dengyi)**

Most of the Yis are good drinkers and don't need the excuse of a special occasion. They often sit on the grass and take turns to drink a spirit called *zhuanzhuan jiu*, or circling drink. The Yi people also like tea, but there is a special custom: the tea made by the elderly should only be drunk by themselves and should not be offered to anyone else; similarly, when a neighbour or a visitor arrives, the host or hostess offers a jar and a cup and lets the guest make his or her own tea. The Yis believe that the tea made by others is not as delicious as that made by oneself.

## Love and Marriage

The courtship and wedding ceremonies of the Yis are very colourful. In the mountainous and semi-mountainous regions of Guizhou, young people usually find their loved one at major festivals such as the Flower Festival, Flower Street and Torch Festival. The young people get to know each other as they dance and hold singing contests, which sometimes last for several days and nights.

During a wedding, water sprinkling is prevalent. Brothers, sisters and young friends of the bride throw water over the bridegroom's entourage as they arrive to pick up the bride. Only when everyone is

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thoroughly soaked, can the bride look forward to a future without the need to carry drinking water from afar and without drought.

In suburban Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, a custom exists that from the eighth day of the wedding, the wife has the right to live with her parents until she gives birth. During this period, the husband is only allowed to live with her on the occasion of major festivals. When the first baby is born, the husband goes to the house of the parents-in-law to share the good news. If it's a boy he takes along a rooster, if it's a girl he takes a hen.

"Bride snatching" is a very dramatic wedding episode among the Yis in Liangshan. Several days before the wedding, friends and

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1. An elder relaxing in front of his house (by Wang Miao)
2. A craftsman painting a wooden tub (by Wang Miao)
3. The knife, with a painted lacquer handle, serves as both a daily utensil and a piece of handicraft. (by Wang Miao)

relatives of the groom visit the bride's house to pick her up. However, the bride's friends and relatives have a few surprises for them. Good-naturedly, the groom's entourage tolerate the water sprinkling and the smearing of their faces with soot from the bottom of a pot. Finally, amidst the chaotic merry-making, they manage to "kidnap" the bride.

## Festivals

Tiaogong Festival is celebrated in Nabo County, Guangxi. On a piece of open ground villagers build a high bamboo platform on which a man sits and issues commands while others dance the Golden Bamboo Dance.

The Torch Festival is by far the most solemn occasion of the Yis. There are various beliefs regarding its origin. According to one legend, a man of great strength, Atilaba, instructed people to carry torches every year to fight off the heavenly worms sent down by a vicious spirit in the sky. From the 24th to the 26th day of the sixth month on the lunar calendar, people hold various celebrations, including bull fighting, sheep wrestling, horse racing, wrestling and beauty contests. As night descends, numerous torches are lit which people hold while parading and dancing.

The Flower Festival is celebrated by the Yi people in Dayao County, Yunnan, on the eighth day of the second month on the lunar calendar. Young people dressed in their holiday best get together to pick flowers in the hills. Then, they lay the flowers around their homes and even tie them on the horns of their buffalo and sheep. This is also a day of courtship. Young men pin a fresh camellia on their sweetheart's bag, and in turn the girls tie a silk tree blossom on their man's *lusheng* pipe.

## Taboos

In their everyday life, the Yis have many taboos, such as not working in the fields during the day of a thunder storm as it will bring about a drought. None of the family members should work in the fields in the day a baby is born, otherwise the crop production will suffer. When a crow or an owl is heard nearby, it means bad luck. When visiting as a guest at the home of the Yis, one should only sit in the upper direction, or to the left or right of the cooking range, and never put one's foot on it or approach it....

## Beliefs

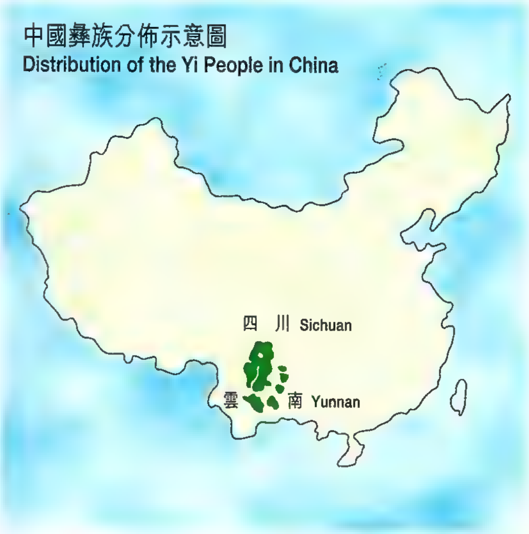
The Yi people believe that a man has three spirits, which remain even after death. One will be guided by the sorcerer to the origin of the family's ancestors, another will guard the tomb and the third will stay home.

They also believe that everything on earth has a spirit. For example, when there is a bumper harvest, they have been blessed by the God of Grain. So, the ceremony "calling the spirit"exists among the Yis in central and western Yunnan. After harvesting is done in a field, the head of the family stands in the plot, reciting his prays and inviting the God of Grain to go with him and stay at his home so as to guarantee a good harvest for the next year.

## Culture

The Yi folk literature is rich and has many forms, including poetry, stories, fables, and proverbs. Based on their daily activities and experiences the Yi people often create their own lyrics which they put together with traditional tunes. At celebrations such as weddings, the elderly often conduct a dialogue by singing to each other. The characteristic songs and dances of the Yi minorities are widely acclaimed throughout the country.

The Yis also create many handicrafts. One example are the embroidered bags, tablecloths, curtains and bedding of the Hani people (a branch of the Yi ethnic group, in Lunan County, Yunnan Province). The simple but elegant lacquerware of the Liangshan Mountains is also worth mentioning as they have become very popular with tourists. Using yellow, red and black, the three most favoured colours of the Yis, the craftsmen paint bold and primitive pictures on various items such as bowls, wine cups, harnesses and religious utensils.


中國彝族分佈示意圖
Distribution of the Yi People in China

The Liangshan area in Sichuan Province attracts many tourists. To get there take a train or a bus from Chengdu, to arrive in Xichang, capital of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, approximately 12 hours later. From Xichang, a bus ride of between three-five hours will take you to any of the several counties inhabited by the Yi people such as Puge, Zhaojue and Meigu.

*Article by Huang Yanhong*
*Translated by Huang Youyi*

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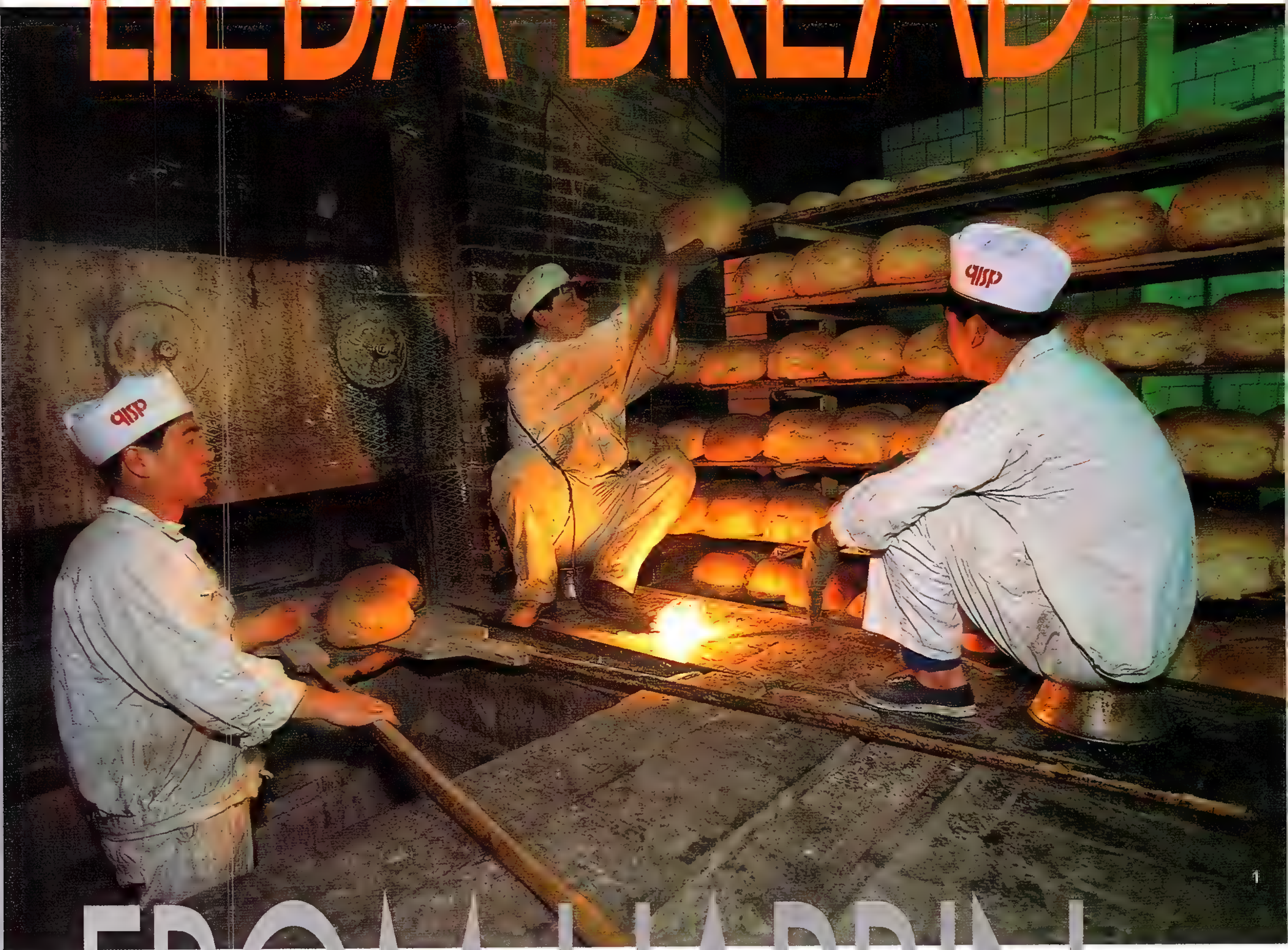
# LIEBA BREAD FROM HARBIN



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Photos by Xie Guanghui
Article by Yee Ket Choi

1. **Inside the bakery.**
2. **Freshly baked lieba is just too irresistable.**
3. **The Qiulin Shopping Centre, a typical Russian-style building.**
4. **Every day customers line up at the bakery inside the Qiulin Shopping Centre.**

Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province in north-east China, has long appealed to migrants from different regions and nations, particulary Russia. Some decided to stay and make this city their home, and so, over the course of time, a strong Russian influence has prevailed over the city. Strolling through the streets and market areas one can see the Russian imprint on the town in its architecture, cuisine, clothing and recreational activities.

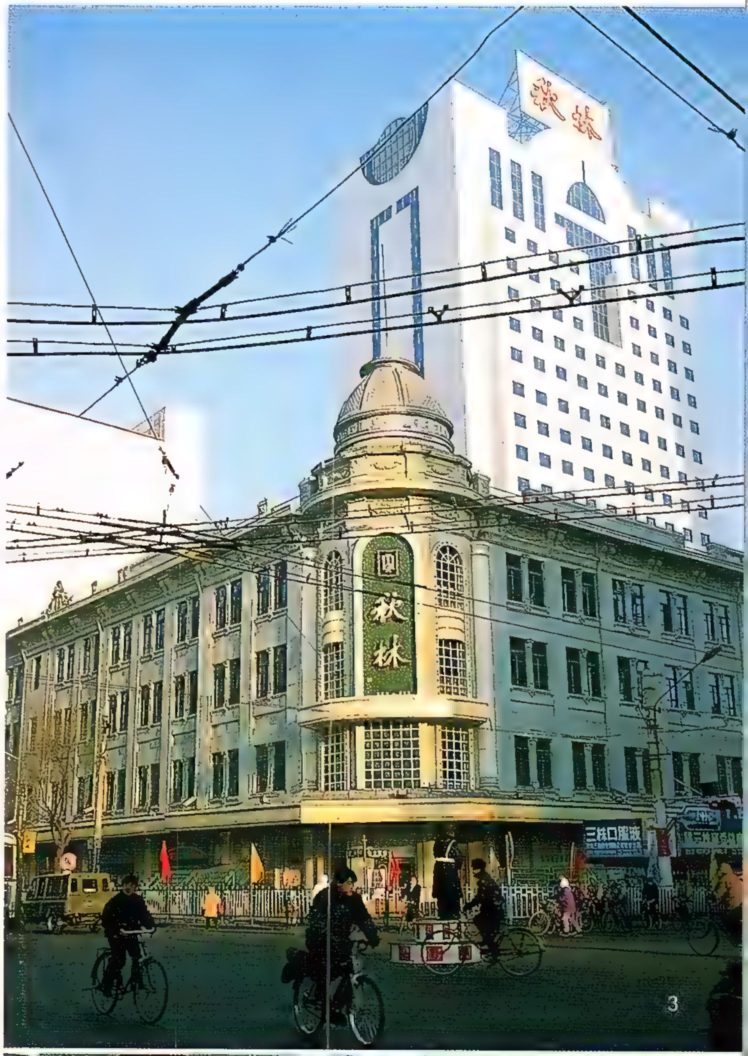
One of the oldest shopping centres in Harbin is the Qiulin Building in Nangang District which is instantly recognisable by its magnificent dome, a legacy of the town's Russian influence. Inside the centre there are many stores selling a variety of goods, but the one which immediately draws attention is a bakery selling huge rounds of Russian bread known as *lieba* (the locals also call it "Qiulin-brand large bread"). Every morning one can find people queuing up outside the shop hoping that there will still be some loaves left by the time they get to the front of the queue.

The Qiulin Company was established in 1948 by Russians. Although the company produces over 100 different kinds of food, the *lieba* is its speciality. Each of the large *lieba* weighs about two kilos, the smaller ones half a kilo, and the tiny ones about 100 or 200 grams. Normally, *lieba* is a traditional bread loved by Russians, but judging from the queues outside the shop each morning it has become a favourite among the locals too. Every day the huge stoves of the Qiulin Company bake 504 loaves – by the end of the day all of them are sold out.

The ingredients used to make *lieba* consist of high quality wheat flour, yeast, sugar and salt. The dough is allowed to rise in a warm place after which it is kneaded and shaped. Finally, it is placed into an oven which has been heated using hard wood and left to bake for about one hour. When the bread is removed it is brown and crisp on the outside and soft inside. The bread can be stored for up to a week.

At one time the Qiulin Company intended to stop baking *lieba* because there was no profit in making this special bread; each large loaf only sells for five yuan, which is really cheap but it is impossible to put the price up as the customers are unwilling to pay more. To keep the local residents happy the company decided to continue producing *lieba* bread each day but in limited numbers – which explains the queues outside the shop each morning!

*Translated by Xiong Zhenru*



FOODS OF QIULIN
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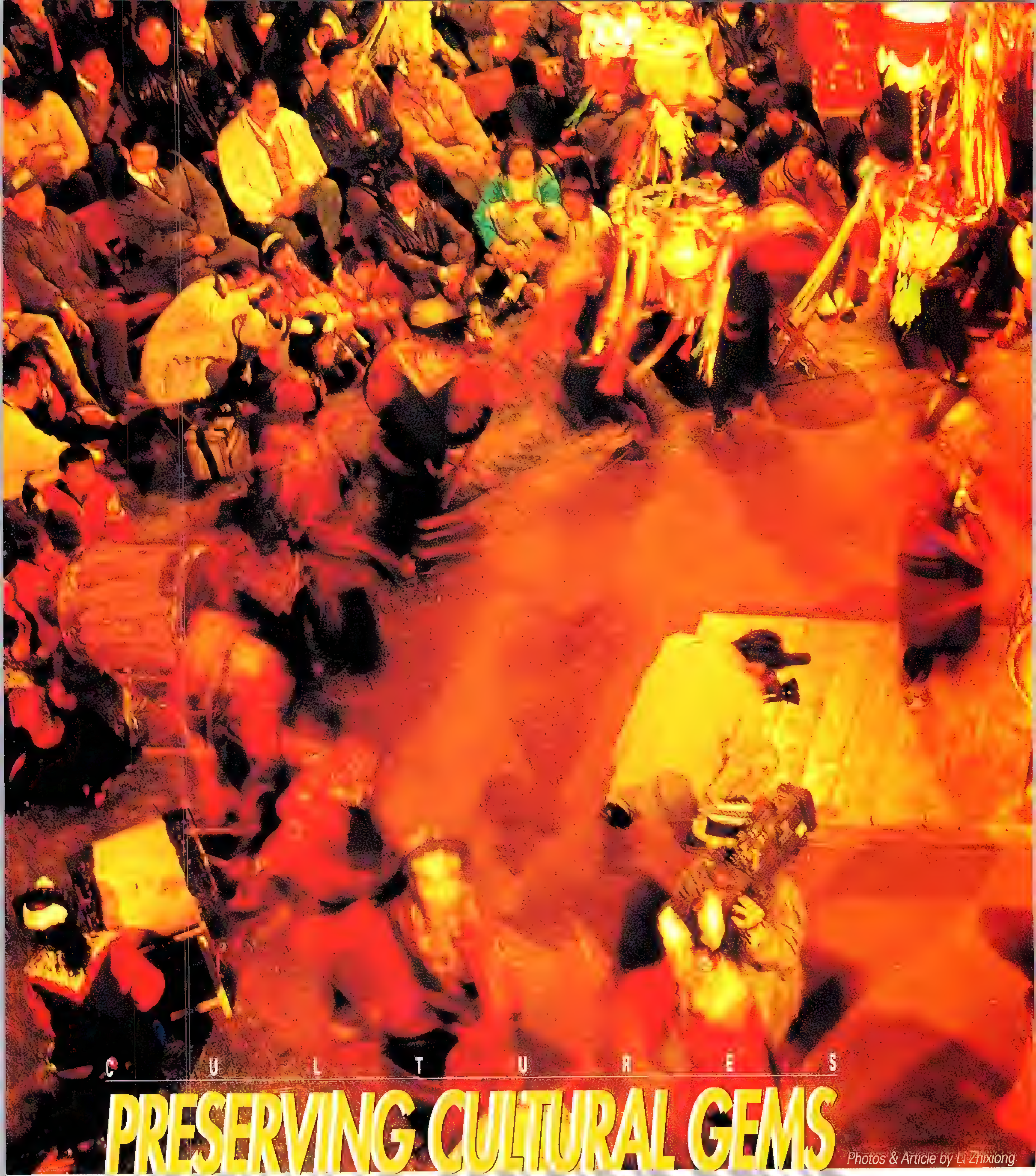

CULTURES

# PRESERVING CULTURAL GEMS

Photos & Article by Li Zhixiong

Celebrating the Yi Torch Festival

I was invited by a friend to attend the celebrations of the first Torch Festival held in the newly-established Yunnan Ethnic Culture and Traditional Customs Centre, at the Chinese Catalpa Park in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province. I arrived early and was introduced to Tian Feng, professor and president of the centre. As the professor began to explain the centre's aim, to protect local culture, I found myself being drawn in by his vision and thereafter, whenever I had time, I went to listen to him tell stories and to enjoy the songs and dances of the different ethnic groups in the area.

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1. **Students learning the Yi waiters' dance**
2. **A sorcerer of the Yi ethnic group**
3. **Yi people living by the Honghe River in Yunnan**
4. **Faculty and students of the school**

## From Beijing to Yunnan

From his business card I learned that Tian Feng is a professional composer with the Central Philharmonic Orchestra in Beijing. Eventually, I learned more about him. He has composed many fine musical pieces such as *The First Symphony*, *Symphonic Caprice*, the ballet dance drama *Family* and several operas such as *The Fragrant Grass in the Wilderness*, *The First Emperor and His Son* and *Galileo Galilei*.

Tian Feng first became involved with the centre when he realised China was entering a period of economic change, he worried that the preservation of Chinese arts was being threatened. Almost in despair, he began to wonder: Where is the soul of music? Where is the true essence of the arts? With these questions in mind, he left Beijing and headed for Yunnan.

One day, he arrived at a mountain village belonging to the Va ethnic group. As night fell, he heard a type of instrumental music drifting along on the evening breeze. The music was unique, one he had never heard before. It was evocative of deep sorrow and hardship as well as a yearning wish to possess the land, the rivers and the sky. Tian Feng followed the sound of the music and found a man squatting under a tree singing along to the music he played on a self-made, single-stringed fiddle. Tian was moved by the melody. Later, he noticed that no matter where he went, whether to a festival, a funeral, a bride's farewell party, or to an ancestors' memorial ceremony, the local people were always able to produce the most beautiful melodies using simply a leaf, a single reed or a blade of grass. Even a cheer from a group of local people could turn into a melodious song that echoed through the mountains and forests.

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In Yunnan there are 26 ethnic groups with several hundred branches, each of which has its own music. Tian Feng found their traditional music and dances so attractive that he not only enjoyed listening and watching them but also felt compelled to put pen to paper in order to write them down. Shortly after he returned to Beijing, he created many musical pieces, including *The Traces of Love*, a full length performance of songs and dances based on Yunnan's wedding customs, *The Love of the Red River*, a large folk dance, and *Yunnan Lyrics*, a chorus. After a special concert of Professor Tian Feng's musical pieces many of his colleagues in the Central Philharmonic Orchestra said excitedly, "We haven't performed such good music for a long time". An overseas conductor telephoned Tian Feng at four o'clock in the morning to tell him: "I'm so excited after listening to your music that I couldn't help telephoning you. Such wonderful music can not be produced in an air-conditioned house."

But Tian was not content with what he had achieved. Time and time again he returned to Yunnan. However, he began to notice a change which disturbed him: the first time he went to some areas the local people wore their traditional clothes and sang their ancient love songs; the second time he went the tunes remained the same but the words had been replaced by new ones; but, the third time he returned the young people were wearing fashionable jeans and had begun to sing pop songs. Sensing that the traditional cultures of these peoples which had developed over several thousands years were being neglected, Tian Feng felt so much troubled that he could not sleep at night.

## The Fossil-Like Centre

He began to question whether it was possible to establish a fossil-like centre where prominent elders and folk artists from different national minorities could pass on the gems of their traditional culture to the young so that their cultural heritage could be passed on from generation to generation. A tentative idea began to formulate in Tian Feng's mind, and he racked his brains for some time before it took shape. He decided to stop composing – even though he was at his peak – so that he could take on the mission of building the centre from scratch. With great tenacity he began the search for the site and the lengthy process of raising funds. In order to find the most suitable

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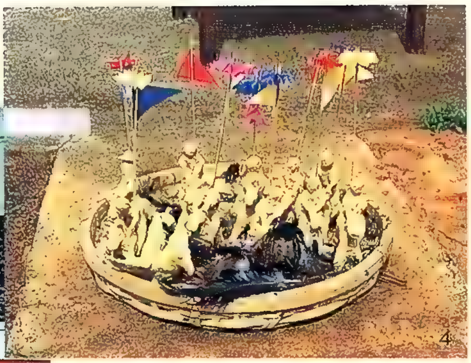
people to be the teachers and students, he went deep into the mountains and trekked over numerous peaks....

After much painstaking work, the Yunnan Ethnic Culture and Traditional Customs Centre was finally set up on the building site of the former South-western Forestry College in Chinese Catalpa Park in Anning, 40 kilometres away from Kunming. Subjected to preserving the traditional cultures of national minorities, it was the first of its kind in China.

This is a special school, where students grow their own vegetables and raise their own pigs and chickens. Although they can not be totally self-sufficient, they manage to produce a couple of dishes for their meals, thus lessening the financial burden on the school. Everyone works willingly and without complaint; teachers and students eat from the same single pot, and the whole school is like one big happy family.

The school provides courses on folk song culture, Dongba culture, Wu culture, and the drum culture. The content and form of these courses are authentic and pure. I attended two classes. One was a lecture given by an local old man on the Dongba culture. I had met this old man once before in the far-off Baishuitai Village in Diqing and I knew he was an expert of this ancient culture, but I had never imagined that he would be teaching on the subject in a classroom. Clad in Dongba costume, the old man lectured seriously on picture-form writing, classic sutras, astronomy, medicinal science, religious and sacrificial ceremonies, literature and art. All the students listened attentively. Both teacher and students used the Naxi language.

Another class I attended was on the weeping song of the Huayao Yis living by the Honghe River, which was sung by the bride at the wedding ceremony to say goodbye to her parents. Here in the class, the bride (played by a student) covered her head with a piece of black cloth. Sitting on the ground among her classmates who took the roles as the bride's friends and relatives, she began to sing the song with a slow and touching tone. A moment later, the black scarf on her head



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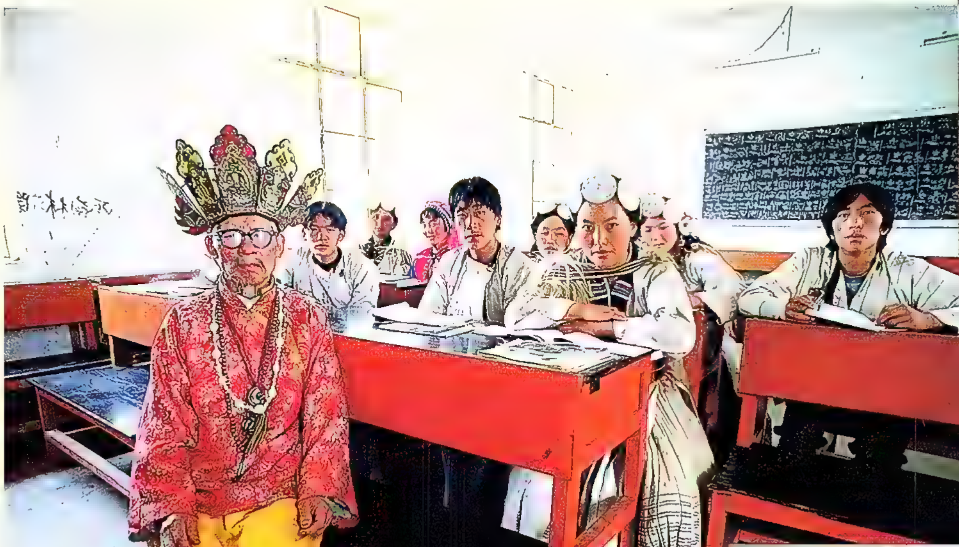

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1. Drummers at practice
2. Learning the weeping song
3. A teacher demonstrating how to make traditional musical instruments
4. Butter figures used for sacrificial ceremonies
5. Teacher and students of the Naxi ethnic group
6. Blackboard drawings in a classroom
7. Teachers and students grow their own vegetables.

7

1. Professor Tian Feng
2. Officials of the Ford Foundation visiting the centre

began to quiver, the song had become very sentimental and the girl's sobs could be heard mingling with the melody – it was heartbreaking.

One ancient ritual dance worth noting is the Divine Drum Dance which I saw performed for the first time at the celebration of the Torch Festival held at the centre. A huge drum was placed on the ground in the centre of a dozen or so big drums. A group of several dozen girls, all in their ethnic costume, beat the drum while dancing. The vibration of the drum was so strong that I could hardly hold my camera steady and had to use the tripod instead. The Divine Drum Dance once existed in Touga Village, a small hamlet of the Yi people in Lüchun County, Yunnan, and only a few old women could perform it. The art form was on the verge of extinction despite the fact that it had existed for several thousand years. Once the centre was established, the old women were invited here to pass their skills on to the younger people, and as a result several dozen girls have taken over the drumsticks to ensure the survival of the art form.

The Collective Dance of the Yi nationality was a recreational folk dance, performed at happy occasions such as New Year festivals, weddings and in celebration of a bountiful harvest. But the folk dance had more than 100 sets of vocabularies and dance forms, no one villager could remember them all. The centre set about the task of gathering the vocabularies and invited folk dancers of different schools to pass what they knew to the young students. The centre achieved what it had set out to do and audiences have widely acclaimed them. After watching the performance, a visiting American scholar wrote in the visitors' book: "You have many difficulties, but you are rich; the United States is very rich, but very poor". It is true, the Ethnic Culture and Traditional Customs Centre is often faced with various difficulties, but its teachers and students are working hard to continue the cause that they have started. So, when professor Tian told his faculty and students to prepare for the worst that "if we cannot keep the school going any longer, you all have to go home and wait until we find the money", they all nodded their consensus with faithful understanding.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru

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# 1,500 KILOMETRES BY MOTORCYCLE

*Photos & Article by Joshua Cohen*

Paul and I were in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, for the summer holidays. As Paul is an experienced biker we thought it might be fun to drive home to Changsha. After a full day's bargaining we managed to secure a three-year-old 250cc Chinese-built Xingfu motocycle for 3,000 yuan cash which is more suited for short commutes than the long haul of 1,500 kilometres we were planning, but after a small test trip we were fairly confident and ready to set off.

The day of our departure dawns cold and drizzling. We are prepared for neither and consider delaying our departure for another day to avoid the rain, but instead we decide to borrow some ankle-length, rubberised coats from a friend's father and set off. Based on our experiences in the West, we estimate our journey will take three days, assuming a modest 100km/h and six hours driving per day.

We arrive at Linxia in the late afternoon. It has taken us eight hours to travel 100 kilometres. The next morning we head for Xiahe. Although it is only 100 kilometres from Linxia, it is another world straight out of Tibet; most of the local people are of the Tibetan ethnic group. The town is cradled in a valley in the midst of the Nanshan Mountain where the Labrang Monastery, one of the six major temples of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, is located. Prayer wheels form a 200-metre wall near the entrance of the monastery, inviting pilgrims to spin them, writing the name of the Buddha on the wind.

Once outside of Xiahe, the countryside is very different from Hunan: hilly, fairly dry, wheat and corn instead of rice. It is early harvest time, and tiny tractors loaded with wheat putter on the road ahead of us. For some reason the roads are frequently covered with thick mats of wheat, which the local farmers harvest and leave in piles in the road to be threshed under the wheels of passing vehicles. Picturesque if you happen to be on a bus but not the safest driving surface for a motorcycle; plus the threshed wheat can get sucked inside our crankcase and give us an engine full of porridge, so we must slow down.

After lunch we get on our way again. The sky clouds up, and it begins to rain, so we hurry to make the next town. Suddenly the bike begins to splutter, and we pull over to find the fuel line nearly severed. Whether it has been cut on purpose or by accident we can't tell, but we are in the middle of nowhere in the rain with petrol pouring out of our tank. We cut some plastic from a bag and wrap it around the tube, securing it with chewing gum. It seems to hold, and we take cover to wait out the storm. We spend the night in a small village where we pay 2 yuan each to rent a room in a rammed earth building.

The following morning the Xingfu refuses to start, and we discover that the battery has gone dry and I must push-start the bike on what is possibly the only flat stretch of ground on our trip so far. We press on. Our first flat of the day comes at about noon – the rear wheel, of course, which is much harder to change. The tube, when revealed, is a quilt-work of rubber patches. We spend an hour getting it fixed, but after two more flats in quick succession, we decide to buy a new tube and tyre. Paul takes the whole wheel and hitches a ride on a passing truck. I wait by the bike. Three hours later he returns in a watermelon truck, and the kind driver invites us to stay overnight at his home.

## Visiting a Friend in Huining

We are currently averaging 225 kilometres and two breakdowns per day, with only nine days left to cover the 1,500 kilometres back to Changsha. If we are to keep on schedule, we cannot have any more major delays. We waste time looking for Huining, the town where Thomas, one of our students, lives and whom we had promised to visit. It turns out to be a tiny village at the end of a rutted mud track. The village comes alive when we pull in; we learn that the last foreigner to visit the town was a Russian, who came 15 years previously.

The countryside is mostly dry, yellow hills, interrupted by sudden crevasses, cut by streams. The farmers grow their crops at the bottom of these crevasses under intense irrigation. Thomas's father grows wheat, watermelon, corn, sunflowers, and various vegetables, and keeps a small flock of sheep. Thomas shows us hundreds of tiny caves cut by hand into the yellow earthen cliffs behind the village, each no more than two metres wide and three metres deep. When his parents first arrived 30 years ago everyone lived in those tiny caves. In our honour, his father kills one of his sheep for us.

We begin riding hard and the days drift into each other. We try to drive eight hours a day with a break for lunch. There is no question of driving at night – the roads are in very poor condition and unlit. I am becoming badly saddle sore.

When we finally leave Gansu and enter the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region the scenery changes to green, rolling hills. But the poor road surface limits our speed to 60 km/h. We stop for lunch in small towns where we are probably the first foreigners the locals have ever seen in person. Sometimes people stroke the hair on my arms in wonder. Even in large cities a foreigner attracts attention, but here we are surrounded. Paul once ate a bowl of fried rice surrounded by a crowd eight people deep.

We have so far been riding without helmets. Paul bears the full brunt of the wind but we are unable to find proper riding goggles for him and so he has to make do with a small pair of sunglasses. We both have bad sunburn on our faces. The morning before we reach Xi'an we buy green Mao caps to protect our faces from the sun and also from the policemen. Although we have all the proper documents, two foreigners on a motorcycle is an irresistible draw for a traffic cop.

Xi'an is world-famous for its terra-cotta soldiers, but we pass through like ghosts, arriving late at night, leaving after breakfast the next morning. Outside the town, the hills begin to flatten, and the scenery changes from wheat and corn to tobacco, to rice. Several times we turn down a dirt road studded with rocks, convinced that we have taken a wrong turn, that this can't be the major road shown on our map, but it usually turns out to be right.

We travel south-east, through Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan and Hubei provinces. In Shuanghe, Hubei, we study the map and, estimating our average of 250 km/day, we are about a day and a half from Changsha. This is great news; it has been incredibly dusty and dirty on the road, and the tiny places where we sleep don't have showers. It has become very difficult to keep clean. I am suffering from extreme saddle soreness and my clothes are filthy enough to stand up by themselves. We both yearn to be at home.

## Heading Home

In the morning we get up early and make great time; by 4:00 p.m. we have covered 300 kilometres. We are both tired, and debate quitting, but decide to go for it. We are supposed to be back in Changsha today, and although we could stop for the night and make it back easily the next day, we decide to keep riding. Suddenly, we realise we are riding through a city, Changde, where we have been before, knowing that we can make it home by dark if we press on. Then, on the outskirts of town, the chain snaps. It is 6:00 p.m., we are stranded three kilometres outside of town. After two weeks of taking the Xingfu apart and reassembling it, we know exactly how to fix the chain, but we don't have the proper tools. We are near tears at being so close. We wander back and forth along the road searching for a miracle, and two buildings over we find one: a repair shop. We press the owner to accept some money, walk back to our bike and fit the chain. It is sunset by now, but we have to go on. We have never driven at night before, never even tried the headlight, which we now switch on. As the sun goes down the road quickly becomes pitch black, and the headlight is pathetic, illuminating no more than 15 feet of road in front of us. We slow down to 20 km/h to avoid potholes, cyclists, and pedestrians, none of whom carry lights or reflectors. Suddenly it begins to rain, or at least it looks like rain, but it is in fact swarms of tiny insects coming out to feed in the twilight attracted to us by our headlight. Paul has removed his sunglasses, and the bugs pound into his eyes. He tries his sunglasses, but then he can't see at all, and settles for squinting. His eyes stream with tears. Then, just as suddenly, the insects vanish.

The road is new concrete, very smooth, pitch black, and empty. As we congratulate ourselves, we sweep over the edge of the last slab poured that day and are abruptly sent airborne over scarred and rutted earth. I manage to grab the back rack before we hit, and somehow Paul manages to keep the bike upright. In the dark, we determine that both of us are alive and unhurt. We limp on. We are battered and defeated: Paul's eyes are red and streaming; my back has begun to join my ass in a throbbing contest. We are ready to give up when we recognise a restaurant, one we often bicycle to from the college. We stop for a bowl of noodles and then laugh at each other. Paul has white racoon marks around his eyes where his sunglasses have protected him from the sun but the rest of his face is sunburned; my face and arms are filthy, my glasses are covered with the residue of dead bugs, and my hair stands on end, frozen with dirt. It takes at least three showers to get my hair clean!

1. **Watermelon truck driver's (2nd left) family with Paul (1st left) and author (3rd left)**
2. **Labrang Monastery, Xiahue, Gansu**
3. **Farmer towing hay, Ningxia**

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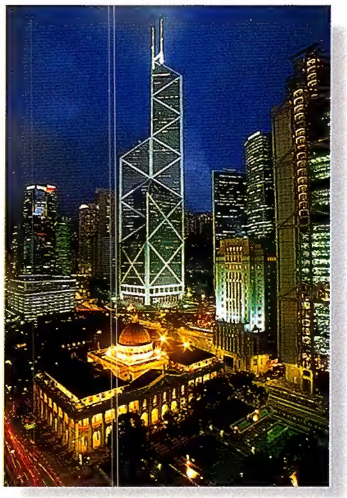

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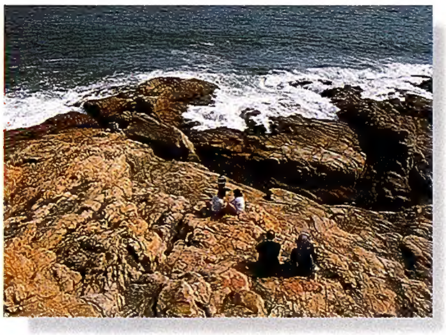

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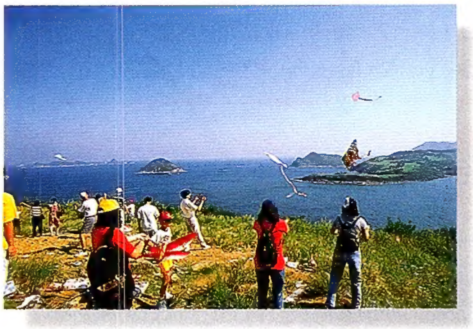

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